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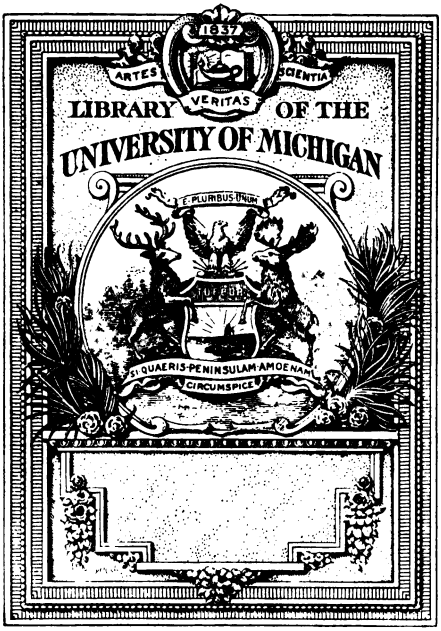
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He led her . . . to where the hamlet lay.

TWISTED EGLANTINE

TWISTED EGLANTINE

BY

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK CRAIG

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK
1905

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TO

VERNON RENDALL

DEAR VERNON: This story is an attempt to reproduce the atmosphere of a period in which you and I have always been interested. The Beau of that decorative time was an interesting survival; he represented the last desperate struggle of the male to keep his fine feathers. Almost everywhere in Nature the male is the more richly adorned of the sexes; and just as the Beau died in the last ditches, if I may put it that way, man did his best to keep in correspondence with Nature. For nearly a hundred years he has definitely given in.

The Beau, then, has the aspect of the pathetic; he led a forlorn hope and he perished. And he was thus in his way an idealist, but it was an idealism of dress and manners only. Yet he had, it must be thought, some moral code for his guidance in life, and I do not believe that under his cravat and waistcoat the Beau was still the Beau. If you scratched him you found the man.

If I fail to convince others by my portrait, you at least will know that it has been assiduously and sincerely painted; and I leave it thus to your judgment, with perhaps some confidence in your friendship.

Yours sincerely always,

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON.

June 1, 1905.

191912

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TWISTED EGLANTINE

CHAPTER I

ENTER BEAU BLAKISTON

INTO the harbor of Lymington, upon a wild March afternoon, struggled the Southampton packet under her topsails, flying before the scud and wind which came up the river and broke farther north upon the uplands of the New Forest. She had put off from Yarmouth across the Solent, and was for beating to Southampton, carrying, together with freight less precious, the person and fortunes of Sir Piers Blakiston. But midway in that narrow and treacherous channel the wind veered, shifted, strengthened to a gale, and threshed up a heavy sea. She pitched in the cross tides, lurched like a drunkard before the hurricane, and took the blue water with every foot she traveled; so that, thus savagely headed off and pounded from her direct course, the packet was driven to put her nose round, and, giving up the struggle, to run for the nearest port before the storm. She reached little Lymington at five of a blustering day, her precious burden still safe aboard, wet to the skin through his fine clothes, and cursing gently under his breath to his friend and companion, Captain Miles. The packet berthed along the jetty, and Sir Piers made a gesture toward the master.

"Where are we now, sir?" said he in peremptory and peevish tones. "Where the devil's this? Call you this Southampton?"

"Sir;" says the other shortly, as one who has been at the mercy of many questions and has tired of it, "Sir, I informed you long since we must give up fetching Southampton Water to-night. 'Tis Lymington, and a good quiet town enough, where your honor must make shift to find warm quarters for yourself," with which he turned brusquely away.

Captain Miles uttered an exclamation, and would have followed him, but Sir Piers put out a white detaining hand on which sparkled a jewel.

"If you go, Harry, I shall perish," he said. "Did any speak? I am damnably nipped. Who's that rough fellow that goes by there?"

"Why," says Harry Miles, opening his honest eyes, "it is the captain that spoke with you just now, the lout."

"Captain!" said Sir Piers indifferently, considering. "Ah, yes. I have observed him on this infernal passage. He is in charge, I suppose, of this boat. Why the devil does he land us here? If the Prince would make me Lord High Admiral I would revolutionize these coasts. There should never be a storm on them. Harry, what is this villainous place's name?"

"'Tis Lymington," responded Captain Miles, with stolid patience.

Sir Piers threw up his chin with a gesture of despair.

"Where is Lymington?" he murmured. "I declare

I never heard of it. I hope there is some civilization here. I have lived all my life in the terror lest I should be landed in Ireland against my will. 'Tis not Ireland, Harry? For God's sake, it mustn't be Ireland!"

"No," said Miles, with a grin, "'tis Hampshire, sure enough, and we can drive to Southampton to-morrow. We shall do well enough here, if we can find the best inn, and a good bottle of wine."

"A good bottle!" murmured Blakiston plaintively. "A good bottle! O Lord, Harry! A good bottle! Well, my dear sir, there's faith left in England. Never tell me there's no faith left. Credulous gulls, my dear Harry—that's what you and your like are. Lead the way, sir, and I must follow, consigning *en route* this captain—you said captain, Harry?—to perdition. Damme, I sweat and shiver at the same time. I have got my death. Go on, Harry."

Captain Miles, a stiff square figure, bluff of aspect and stolid of intelligence, moved forward, and the two landed on the jetty in the rude wind, followed by Sir Piers's servant with many bags and valises, a short lithe man, black of eye and sleek of face, who maneuvered his various burdens with the dexterity of an acrobat. Sir Piers himself, wet and miserable, a frown on his clean, well-featured face, and a thin sparkle of wit issuing at intervals from his lips, stood peevishly regarding the efforts of his man.

"Horner, is the green bag there, man?" he said sharply. "Why, there is no sign of it. Where the devil have you laid it? I will not have you budge a foot without it. Good heavens, Harry, here's Horner expects me

to want my green bag. You know what's in it. I showed you in town. See that he finds it, lad. I trust you. Damme, Horner shall go."

"It's all right, Blakiston." Miles's sturdy voice reassured him. "The bag is here. Heavens, I wish I had such a man as Horner. He is invaluable. But we must find a house to shelter us. There is a rain coming up. I see the heavens black over by the Island."

Sir Piers shrugged his shoulders. "Find it, Harry, find it," he said querulously. "I refuse to remain here all night. Lord, why did I leave town. I should have dined with my Lord Crayle this night; and to-morrow the Prince has a party."

"The Prince must do without you," remarked Miles bluntly. "We shall do well enough with a good inn. I will soon discover one," and he turned his head of fair hair and his blue eyes toward the lights of the town. He stood, very strong and blond, with frank eyes, a careless gait, and the air of youth under his years. He was near thirty, yet might have passed for even less, and his blunt and serious glances as a rule beaconed good humor. You would not have supposed him intimate to Beau Blakiston, nor at this moment, truly, would you have supposed Beau Blakiston stood before you in the gathering darkness, damp and dismal and foreboding. Yet Sir Piers was a noted figure about the person of His Royal Highness, a favorite at present, and a man of wit and elegance, but one whom the cruel elements had cast up on a strange, uncouth shore, to die, surely, of exposure to rude glances and bad food. Sir Piers pettishly sheltered himself from the wind.

"I beg you will be quick, Captain," he said, with asperity.

Captain Miles needed no incentive. He was an alert man, sharp in his decision and steadfast in his action. Moreover, he was sorry for his friend, who was accustomed to the comfort and flattery of courts, and naturally must resent the surly behavior of the shipmaster and the elements. He had taken two or three steps toward the town, when a figure emerged upon the jetty with an aspect of hurry. Sir Piers had found a seat for himself under the cover of some huge bales which were piled upon the jetty, and him by some chance the newcomer approached. He was a young man, lithe and eager, but his face was almost a blur in the falling dusk.

"Sir," he said, addressing Sir Piers, "are you Mr. Norman, and where lies the Thisbe?"

Beau Blakiston fixed him with a petulant gaze, and for a full minute there was no answer; then he waved a hand toward Miles, and wagged it again at the stranger, as if he would say by this gradual gesticulation that he called in the one to deal with the other. Miles, prompt as ever, responded to the invitation; he came back a pace or two, and addressed the young man.

"This is not Mr. Norman," he said bluntly, "and we don't know where the devil the Thisbe lies."

"Or what the devil it is, Harry," remarked Sir Piers placidly. "Tell him, or what the devil it is."

"Or what the devil it is," repeated Harry Miles, in obedience to his master.

Our stranger cast a quick glance at both, a glance ever so much sharper than Captain Harry Miles's, and

for a moment appeared to hesitate; then without reply he darted away and left them. Miles was moving off again on his mission, quite regardless of this transient episode, which he had already forgotten, when he was stayed by the voice of his friend.

"Harry," said the beau, who observed all things and as a rule feigned to know nothing. "Did you see that man? There is youth. What does he here? I could make his fortune in town, I and Blomfield. I make no doubt he is a country loon. But his eyes are admirable instruments—they would pierce the sex if he knew how to use 'em. He doesn't, faith—all he can think is to throw 'em at us in wrath. Harry, does he think we tremble? I did not; did you? Lord, I would I had his youth," he murmured sadly; "I am getting old and melancholy. If he could sell me youth!"

Captain Miles burst into healthy laughter. "Nonsense," he said. "You are a chicken, Blakiston. Why, you're no more than eight-and-thirty."

"Eight-and-thirty," assented Sir Piers nodding. "That's it—eight-and-thirty; and I would be eight without the thirty. Twice times one are two. Yes, I should have two lives then, for as it is I stop at forty. 'Tis the decent age."

"What would the Prince say?" demanded Miles, with a clumsy sense of sarcasm.

"The Prince!" He extended his hands with an ineffable gesture. "How cold it is! Harry, why the devil don't you bring this inn? Dear George would swear—a most common habit, a damnable bad habit. He expects to be five-and-twenty all his life. I know

better, as I have been taught arithmetic. Yet if I were he I think I would undertake to remain forty for some years. But as it is, I am Piers Blakiston only. Harry, the inn, please."

"Well, you are as good as"—began the soldier stoutly, but was interrupted.

"The inn, Harry, as you love me," said Beau Blakiston sweetly. "I can't wait much longer. I have only two more years, you see."

With a short laugh, as at some jest he had hardly fathomed, Captain Miles moved off, and found Horner still busy among his packages. He dispatched him on an errand, and stood by the verge of the jetty until the man's return, watching the fall of night, and whistling. Then comes Horner with his information, and orders were given him to bring his baggage to the Angel. Sir Piers himself, warmer for his shelter, strode forward more briskly, leaning between Harry Miles's arm and his tall cane. They mounted the bank of the river and entered the main street of the town, and as they did so the stranger who had approached them on the jetty hastened past them. He stopped upon the pavement where a lady was awaiting him, and the two fell into talk. She was of forty years or thereabouts, but of a fresh, handsome face and inquisitive glances. She shot these at Blakiston and his companion, who came to a pause, under the restraining influence of Sir Piers.

"There is Youth again," said the beau indulgently. "He confers with Beauty. Do you call that Beauty, Harry? No, I'll be damned if you do."

"'Tis too much of an old hen for me," said Miles,

with a laugh, yet making an effort to move on lest their pause should seem to embarrass a gentlewoman. But Sir Piers lingered, and gazed coolly at the pair.

"I shall take chill directly, and then I shall move on," he declared. "That was excellent cordial Horner produced. I will have another at the inn. See, Harry, here is Captain—Thisbe, is it? There is no pleasing youngsters, and Beauty here may be damned ere Captain Harry Miles pays homage. Lord, lad, do you put a line at twenty and honey? I have known 'em all my life, and reckon it as part of philosophy, that the farther beyond thirty the nearer to that ripe perfection and security of Cleopatra. D'ye remember the Prince's saying? No, you would not have heard it. Well, 'twas all against cream and honey. At twenty I had a surfeit of it; and now I profess it turns my appetite; my belly moves."

But here the young man's attention was drawn to him by the shafts of the woman's eyes, and, turning, he beheld the two gentlemen in the road. A flush passed into his face, and he made a step forward angrily.

"Sir," said Sir Piers, with a graceful movement of recognition, "it is good of you. There were some cravats in the window I desired to see nearer, and you blocked the way. Do you not think green and red an admirable marriage of colors, Harry," he pursued, turning from the astonished stranger. "See how they commingle, and in what material! Olympus, how amazing are the beauties of the country!" and he fixed a cold eye on the lady, and passed on.

"Hen, you said," he murmured, squeezing the Captain's arm. "On the whole, I think you are right, but

a handsome hen. I thought there was none but geese and pigs in the country, yet here is a cackling hen—and a turkey cock," he added thoughtfully.

At the door of the Angel they paused, and Sir Piers looked up into the sky. "The wind falls," said he; "that damnable creature might have been in Southampton by now. I wish George would make me Lord Admiral. Well, I know I shall be bored to my death as soon as this cordial wears off," he continued pettishly. "Harry, I will have your blood or your money. How much have you?"

"Near a hundred guineas," replied the Captain.

Sir Piers considered. "We will dice, then," he said, with decision. "I want most of that. If I am to stay overnight here I must have most of your purse. I never in my life saw so dismal a place. No, not saw," says he again, amending his words, "smelt's the word—yes, smelt. I never in my life smelt such a place." With which delivery he entered the hostelry. The host came bustling out to greet his guests, and seeing two such fine gentlemen of a London air was mightily attentive.

"Gentlemen, you would do me the honor"—said he, and indicated a saloon in which stood two glasses bright with a cordial.

"This is a fellow that knows something," said Sir Piers aloud. "I profess I would adventure if I were younger. But there is Horner. Bid Horner fetch his liquor, Harry," and he nodded amiably to the innkeeper. "I will drink to your house's health, landlord. Tarry a little, and it shall be done expeditiously, I vow. Harry," he added, in a voice which was clearly audible, and was

indeed not meant for privacy, "do you put down this party in your name. I could never endure that any should find I had been here."

The landlord stared at this remarkable command, and, seeming not to know what next to do, backed out of the room into his bar, whence he directed now and then through a window, glances at his curious guests. The news of this arrival spread through his taproom, and many were drawn to gaze through the same eye upon the inner room. The landlord, indeed, in his inquisitive way, sought the company of Horner, who was engaged in opening his master's boxes and arranging his clothes; but Horner was a man of discretion, and had not been valet to Sir Piers for three years to no purpose. Nothing, indeed, could the host get from the bland servant but that the rooms were taken in the name of Captain Miles, who was an excellent soldier, soon to go abroad in the wars.

Meanwhile, the townsfolk who frequented the Angel stared through the window at Sir Piers, who was leisurely sipping his cordial and conversing with his friend. He was for two reasons a figure to call on the eye of the stranger. In the first place, he was a striking character to a country bumpkin, being dressed in the pitch of fashion—in velvets, ruffles, and silk stockings. He stood something over middle height, a slight and elegant body, tapering very neatly, a face delicate in feature but scored with lines, sharp of eye, and determined in its contours, and an easy, graceful poise of head and hip. Yet at this instant there was an incongruity between his pretensions and his actual aspect. For his fine

raiment had been soaked and stained with the salt water, the wind had tampered with his hair as well as with his ruffles and the set of his coat, and this, together with the splashes on his silken hose, gave him almost a meretricious air of grandiosity, as it might be of a strolling mountebank or play actor. To look at Sir Piers, however, none would have thought that he was conscious of this. The clowns gaped through the window, and he sipped his glass comfortably, as if he presented to them the most gorgeous figure in the land. On one occasion he rose, laid aside his cordial, and, as if he was for the first time aware of the existence of the window and was drawn to it by curiosity, approached the barroom and peered through, glass in eye. The starers fled incontinently, and Sir Piers returned, and resumed his conversation with Miles.

"I will never venture it again," said he. "None but a barbarian should own property in such barbarous parts. It was all my uncle's dying, good easy man. He might have lived and died and kept his house in some respectable place—say in Surrey or in Kent, or,"—he glanced round the room,—"no, in Surrey or in Kent only. Add Sussex at the most. Beyond, there is no-man's-land. The pale ceases. There are some rash enough or vulgar enough to include Buckinghamshire and even Hertfordshire, but thank God we don't meet 'em. When I think that I have inherited property in the Isle of Wight, Harry, now for three years, I wonder heartily that the Prince has not cast me off. It is a flaw in him, a small but definite flaw. In his position I would ha' done it myself for certain. I would never have endured a

bumpkin from the Island about me. Good Lord, what a narrow escape I have had! I shiver at the thought."

At this moment appeared Horner at the door with the news that his master's boxes were unpacked and that his *toilette* was laid out. As Sir Piers passed out of the room on his deliberate way to his chamber, a short, bluff-looking man, with graying hair but a ruddy color in his cheeks, entered and came to the fire with the air of possession. He stared with a puzzled look which had in it something of insolence, or at least of indifference to appearances or sensitive skins, at Captain Miles, who, on his part, gave him back his stare with interest.

"Fresh weather," says the newcomer at last.

"Aye, fresh enough," assented Miles curtly, at which, as if he were reminded of some duty, the older man called loudly for the innkeeper, and ordered mulled ale. This he drank, still eyeing the Captain from time to time, but making no further effort to enter upon conversation. The Captain himself, who was no very sprightly wit, and was more at home in the trenches of a leaguer than in courts or parlors, was, nevertheless, moved to contempt by the rustic aspect of his companion. He was none too talkative as a rule, but in this strange town he was disposed to relax his habit of silence, and accordingly he addressed the other.

"Your town is full," said he.

"Aye," assented the gray-haired man, and asked through the window for more mulled ale. "There's a pack come in for market, which is to-morrow. You're a stranger, eh? Come in by the packet that's driven into the river?"

Miles nodded assent, and yawned.

"The ale, Squire," said a voice through the window, clapping down the tankard. The Squire sipped and kicked the fire into a blaze. Captain Miles regarded him vacantly, for by this time he was tired and hungry, whipped by the wind and water of the Channel. He yawned again, and blinked at the Squire, who on his part, having assuaged his slight curiosity, had fallen to thinking on his cattle and the price of beeves at market. An agreeable fragrance from a kitchen somewhere was wafted upon the air, and the Captain's nostrils moved appreciatively. On that moment the door was flung open with a jerk, and there entered a young girl, flushed of face, and holding in her hand a riding whip.

"Papa," she burst forth, "the mare is ready in the shafts, and mamma waits."

The Squire turned from the fire and mumbled, "Sit you down, Barbara; you shall not hurry me. Let 'em wait," he said, with his broad burr.

Captain Harry Miles blinked twice, and the vision still remained before his eyes. Of a moderate high stature, slight, yet bearing the characters of physical health and robustness in every line of her body, the girl seemed to grow where she stood like a flower—so live and natural she was. Her eye shafts struck on Miles, as she recognized that her father was not alone, and he could discern their color even at that distance. They were of a neutral gray, yet seemed to shine forthright with friendliness and candor. They challenged under her brows, but challenged in a pretty shyness. Her face, with its speaking features, was longly oval, her

figure swelled gently over the high girdle, and moved fast beneath the becoming gown of the period. As her gaze dwelled on him for a certain interval of time, and almost, as it might have been, with a gentle depreciation of her entrance, the Captain felt the color run into his face. He had risen, and stood awkwardly, when from behind him suddenly issued a voice.

"Harry," said Sir Piers, in his most delicate accents, "I fear from what passes that we shall have a damnable time. The room! If you had seen it! But I smell ham a-cooking. Good God! ham, Harry! And to sit and feed with the rustics! I am told that there is but one common room. To sup with hogs and"— He came into the room on that word, and stopped. His glass went to his eye deliberately, and he gazed from the Squire at the fireplace to the girl near the outer door. For a moment there was silence, then——

"Amazing!" said Sir Piers, "amazing!" in a small, approbatory voice. He dropped his glass, and settled his ruffles. "I did not know, Harry, that it was possible in Hampshire. Has another packet blown in? I confess I do not understand it. Amazing!" and he raised his glass once more toward the girl.

At this the Squire, who had been looking at him, made an exclamation and scowled.

"You were best to learn manners, sir," he said, very rustic in speech and clearly very hot within.

Sir Piers directed his glass toward him.

"I regret," said he suavely, "to be both poor in sight and hard of hearing. My years, as you will, no doubt, perceive, will account for that. Harry," he

added, in his still voice, which made a pretense of privacy, and carried for all that throughout a room clearer than any shout, "Harry, I will stand the ham—I will endure ham and hogs or ham and eggs, or"——

"Barbara, get you gone," thundered the Squire, turning his wrath on his daughter. Sir Piers elevated his eyebrows. He stood, a fine figure, in the new clothes he had assumed; they were of fine cloth, not velvet, and of a soft peach color, but what was the most distinctive feature of the buck was the white lawn of the ruffles, exquisitely turned, and the fine white cravat majestically adjusted. The girl's eyes lingered on this wonderful gentleman as she turned to obey her father. The Squire followed her noisily, and Sir Piers with a sigh looked at Miles.

"Why did you not warn me of the relationship?" he asked reproachfully. "Papa! How could one have guessed? And now, Harry, there is nothing but ham and hogs, odious ham and horrible hogs," he sighed again, and summoned the innkeeper.

"Ask him who was that went out," said he to the Captain, upon which the obliging soldier put the question quite unnecessarily, as the landlord had already heard.

"Squire Garraway, sir," said the host, with an eye on Sir Piers as of one watching a strange animal half in fear and half in wonder.

"Ask him, Harry, who the devil he may be," commanded the beau; and poor Harry put the question stolidly enough.

"Squire Garraway by Boldre, sir, in the Forest."

Sir Piers nodded. "Bumpkin," he said, and dismissed the subject forthwith by bidding the man proclaim his wines. The eager landlord ran to fetch his list, and Sir Piers exchanged a humorous glance with the Captain. When the landlord returned he took from him the table of wines, which, of a truth, was none too extensive.

"Landlord," he said, "which is come from France?"

"Sir," said the astonished landlord, "there is no trade 'twixt us and France this many years."

"Landlord, I will drink water," said Sir Piers, handing back the table with a sigh of despair.

"Sir!" protested the innkeeper.

"Water, water!" repeated Blakiston, with impatience, and moved away. But Captain Miles stepped into the breach bluntly.

"My friend has a fancy for good Burgundy, my man," he said, "but that, I suppose, you have not. In which case"——

"Yes, I have, sir," declared the innkeeper jubilantly, and almost under his breath. "'Deed I have, sir, you shall see."

The Captain looked dubious, and the landlord chuckled.

"Where it come from is more than I can tell, sir, but there it is—there it is."

"Oh," says Miles, grinning. "Then if there it is, it shall be here."

"So it shall, it shall, I promise," declared the man, and bustled away.

It was only at his second glass that Sir Piers gave

his full attention to the wine. They supped not on ham, but on a woodcock very rarely done, and Sir Piers was in a good humor. He cocked the glass aslant and eyed it in the light.

"Harry, I begin to think our host is a thief—and a man of taste," he said. "We will have one whole bottle of this for the new toast." He meditated. "If the Prince had seen her! That is the best of the new fashion. It becomes the bumpkin handsomely, like any city dame. A taste and a fire—so she has, Harry, a very pretty little toad. But to have the hogpen smelling in one's nostrils all day! I had a whiff of it from papa, who, I doubt not, has his nose in the trough week in week out. 'Tis a pity the little wench should live her life in the byres. A toast, Harry!"

CHAPTER II

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

In his own circle in town Sir Piers Blakiston had the reputation of a wit, generally pleasant and not infrequently caustic. It was said of him, by those of his own kind who were jealous of his progress in the royal favor, that he had too wide a world, and knew too many people. Certainly he was less austere in his social attitude than most of his compeers, but he was none the less barefaced. His effrontery was vast, as in the celebrated story of the Earl of Fleetwood, but at the same time he was at once (so declared his enemies) too easy and too accessible. Sir John M'Mahon said of him that he would be familiar with his butler, which was not only ridiculous, but also, when it came to the ears of Sir Piers, called forth the smiling reply, "I'm afraid we have all of us been forced to be that," which, uttered with a tiny sigh, was at once appreciated by those who heard it and knew M'Mahon's history and origin. Yet affability undoubtedly was a feature of Sir Piers's character, affability no less than the most cool and barren selfishness. It is to be doubted if he cared one pin for the feelings of any other than himself, so that his friendliness, or even his familiarity, when he chose to indulge it, passed for very little in reality. Mr. Sheridan, who was a man of heart and amiability, was an admirer of this man of

amiability and no heart, but was accustomed to criticise him frankly.

"Blakiston," said he, "neither games nor drinks fair. He is always a point or two the right side of me," which, after all, was not saying very much.

But the affair of Lord Fleetwood, to which reference has been made, sheds perhaps the best light upon the man and his indifference to scruples, provided his "form" was correct. For, being in flagrant offense with respect of the Countess, he was challenged by Fleetwood, whom he did not know, and the two met in the usual way at Chalk Farm. Blakiston, having himself received a ball in his shoulder, walked up to where his adversary was showing his teeth over a broken wrist.

"I regret you are hurt, my lord," said he amiably, "and I shall always be greatly indebted to this little incident for our acquaintance," which came very near to causing a second meeting—so furious was the Earl. Yet it must be admitted by the impartial historian that here was a person of better quality than many others of the circle that surrounded His Royal Highness. Here were wit, and a sense of decorum, and a nicety in manners, if no particular sense of morals; whereas the M'Mahons and George Hangers and others of that kidney had nothing in the world to commend them save an extraordinary silliness or a mercenary fidelity. That the Prince had exchanged George Hanger for Beau Blakiston was the measure of his improvement with the advance of years. Thus at eight-and-thirty Sir Piers found himself a well-known buck of town, a handsome fellow with a pretty taste, and an associate of royalty.

He came of an impoverished family, but had managed to carry his fortunes through successfully by various expedients. The death of a maternal uncle had recently improved these, and it was from a necessary visit to the property he had inherited in the Isle of Wight that he was returning when the packet was obliged to seek the shelter of Lymington harbor.

Sir Piers boasted that he had never been out of London or Brighton, which, of course, was not strictly true, but served merely to emphasize the point that no one save a Londoner was worth consideration. You may conceive, then, the annoyance with which he learned that he must put up in a paltry place like Lymington. Add to this that he was landed wet, and not a little queasy in his stomach, and you might find some excuses for a man of his position and temper, if he showed badly in the circumstances. Sir Piers's moderation had, indeed, surprised his faithful but unintelligent friend, Miles, whose devotion was in part admiration for a superior mind, and in part the habit of long acquaintance. Sir Piers supped in quite a good humor, and was still complacent on the morrow when he descended, very late, and very daintily attired, to a breakfast. The prospect of seeing town soon, after his dismal experiences at sea, was stimulating him; already he smelled in his nostrils the fragrance of London streets, already he mounted the steps of Carlton House in imagination, and he saw himself in his special chair even now at Brookes's. In the country the green fields were preparing to break into the gold of daffadowndillies, and the trees were budding in silence, the chaffinch and the thrush were practicing

in the bare copses. But Sir Piers had no eyes or ears for them, nor, indeed, for any other country sound or sight, as he rolled out of Lymington in the evening on his way to Winchester.

He was by now in a bad temper, for which there were some excuses. For the innkeeper had met the Captain's request for a chaise and horses that morning with apologies and regrets, and a statement that he had no horses fit to do a day's work. It was market day, and every animal in the neighborhood was in use; if the gentlemen would wait until later in the day, he would see what he could arrange. Attempts to find the animals elsewhere proving of no avail, the two were obliged to fall back on the landlord's offer. Consequently it was late in the afternoon, close upon dusk, in fact, when they started, and they were forced to make Winchester their objective, instead of traveling, as they had intended, to Basingstoke. Sir Piers's anger displayed itself not so much in an open fit of temper, as in silence and sarcasm, which, directed unjustly at the head of his companion, never pierced that gallant officer's skin.

"If you would but go to sleep, Blakiston," said he bluntly, "you would not find the way so long."

"My dear Miles," said Sir Piers sharply, "we are not all hogs or—soldiers. Will you oblige me by closing that window tight, as the wind is ruffling my cravat."

Miles laughed good-humoredly, and turned to obey. The chaise lurched over the abominable road, and began to go down. Hitherto they had been slowly mounting, and on their left lay the broad expanse of Setley Heath fading gravely into the night. The carriage rocked

worse than ever, and the wind, which had got up toward dark—a wild March wind, the fellow of that which had beaten them off from Southampton—whistled ..... groaned about the windows. Sir Piers shivered and cursed softly.

"If I get to town, Harry," he said plaintively, "I vow never to lodge beyond Windsor. But I don't suppose I shall get there," he added, in a melancholy voice.

His friend gave vent to a jest, but was conscious as he did so that Sir Piers had grasped his arm. He stared. "What is it?"

"We are heeling over," said Blakiston. "The chaise goes over."

Miles thrust a head out swiftly. "Our axle's broken," he cried loudly, and struggled at the handle of the door, shouting to the postilion. Sir Piers lay back against the cushion.

"It is falling your way, Harry," he murmured. "Thank Heaven I shall fall on you"— And at that they fell.

The chaise toppled over and went with a crash; Sir Piers was flung, as he had anticipated, upon his companion, whose arm went through the window to the tune of tinkling glass; yet the shock seemed less than they had looked for, and the reason was clear so soon as the baronet had withdrawn himself from the entanglement of the wreck and surveyed the scene. The chaise had fallen upward against a rising bank, and had by this fortunate accident saved them broken limbs. As it was, Captain Miles did not stir, but lay where he had fallen,

half in and half out of the window. Sir Piers, who had paid no heed to him until after his inspection, now [illegible]ted the postilion and his valet to extricate the injured man. This they at last succeeded in doing without any assistance from Blakiston, who, meanwhile, had made a search among his effects, and brought forth a small flask of cognac. He put a hand on the unconscious man, and turned up his head to the fading light brusquely.

"A blow on the head," said he dispassionately, "and maybe an artery opened in the wrist. He bleeds devilishly. Pour a little of this down his throat," and he put the flask in his valet's hands. The strong liquor revived the Captain, who opened his eyes, and damned very curtly and very faintly.

"Better, Harry?" asked Blakiston critically, and indicated his arm. "Bind that up," he said, "or he'll go off again in a swound. Damme, Captain Harry Miles, you are likely to lose more blood here of this mangy accident than in all the French wars."

Miles grinned feebly, and drank from the flask again. The valet, Horner, had bound up the wrist. The Captain rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Where are we?" he asked. "This is not Winchester."

Sir Piers regarded the remains of the chaise with a face of ineffable disgust. "No," says he, "egad, sir, it looks like Lymington again," and then with an outbreak of petulance, "I will be pinked if I go back to that hole," and he demanded of the postilion where they were. The man explained. They were hard by Boldre,

it seemed, and not more than a few miles from Brockenhurst. Here, they elicited from the fellow, was a decent inn, and hither Sir Piers resolved to proceed, having taken a fit of dislike for Lymington, which was in keeping with his autocratic character. Yet the problem confronted them—how they were to reach Brockenhurst on foot and with an injured man. Sir Piers settled the question in his peremptory way.

"What light's that?" he asked. "There is some house there. They must find us a carriage, and horses, too, if need be. Go at once," he commanded the postilion, "and see that you are quick about it. We can afford no waste of time."

The man looked as if he would demur at first, or at least make some remonstrance, but Sir Piers's imperious gesture waved him away. He disappeared into the darkness, and the valet conducted Captain Miles to the shelter of a hedge, upon the lee of the harsh wind. The horses, which had been cut loose, had apparently come off lightly, and stood smoking by the roadside. Sir Piers walked up and down, chafing and fuming inwardly, but saying no word. At length steps were heard upon the road, and the postilion approached.

"Well," says Sir Piers sharply, "where's your carriage?"

"They will give none, sir," said he. "The Squire—he will lend nothing to nobody, says he. He says he will be damned if he will trust his coach and 'osses to any damned fly-by-night, he says."

"But, you fool," broke out Sir Piers impatiently, "you told him who I was."

"Not knowing, your honor, I couldn't say," responded the postilion civilly.

"That's true," observed Sir Piers, and cackled faintly. "Well, did you not tell him of the injured gentleman?"

"Aye, for sure," said the postilion, "and he said, says he, he might ha' broke his neck for all he cared."

"Damme, here's a savage," said Sir Piers, frowning. "Well, sirrah, back you go to this untamed barbarous Squire, and say that 'Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone presents his compliments to him, and would beg for the loan of a chaise for two hours at most to carry him and a wounded friend to Brockenhurst.'"

He watched the postilion go, and then resumed his pacing of the turf, now and then throwing a word to poor Captain Miles, who was lying with his back against the thorny hedge, a frown on his face which witnessed to pain. Sir Piers spoke equably enough, even with a deliberate assumption of philosophy, and now found time and wit to put a hand on his friend's arm and say pleasantly:

"How now, Harry? Cheer up, man. If we must die, at least we shall die as Englishmen," and thoughtfully, as he smoothed his cravat, "Deuce take me if I would not sooner be storming trenches under Lord Wellington than lie at the mercy of this inclement night and boor."

At this juncture the postilion returned, looking lumpish, but with difficulty veiling a grin.

"The Squire says," said he, in answer to Sir Piers's interrogation, "that Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone may

go to h—l, or anywhither else he can think on, for his shay and 'osses."

"Damnation!" cried out Sir Piers, and then stopped very short. His manner stiffened as it were, and grew silkier at the same time; a light flashed in his cold eye. He bowed instinctively toward the insult and rearranged his ruffles.

"Horner," says he coolly, "you will go to this person who lives with the light yonder, and pay him five guineas for the hire of his chaise. James will guide you."

The Captain ventured on a faint guffaw. "This is not London, Blakiston," he said. "You're not known here."

"Known!" answered Sir Piers, with metallic clearness. "I will wager you fifty, Harry, that this lout by to-morrow shall know me and know no more. To employ a figure from Kitty's profession—the curtain has lifted for the last time. I am paying five guineas for the privilege—only if James be right in describing him as a gentleman, of course."

"Who the devil's James?" demanded Miles wearily.

"Why, the postilion," said Blakiston, in a tone of gentle reproach. "Surely you knew that, Miles. All postilions are James. In my twentieth year I had a coachman called James, since which all postilions are James. And here comes James with Horner," he ended.

Horner saluted his master, while James, as he was thus christened, stood by with a broad smile in the dark, as of one aloof from this amazing affair.

"The gentleman, sir," said Horner, mechanical in

voice and gesture, "regrets that he cannot entertain your proposal."

"Ah, he regrets he must decline it, eh?" said Sir Piers, nodding, while the postilion, "James," looked with astonishment on Horner.

"I must regret to have to trouble the—gentleman once more," said Sir Piers politely. "And you will go back, Horner, and express as much on my behalf. But also say that Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone, having heard of his admirable and world-wide hospitality, being by accident in these parts, determines to give himself the privilege of waiting on the—Squire, in the full hope and confidence of carrying back to town a pleasing memento of his visit."

Horner turned without comment, and on his "Yes, sir" had vanished; the postilion appeared to be bewildered by this scene, and had lost his grin and grown uncomfortable. But at a word from the baronet he assisted Miles to his feet.

"If you can walk so far, Harry, I will promise you shelter," said the beau easily. "The rain is driving up, and this is no place for a wounded hero."

He himself stalked on in front, leaving the Captain to limp on the man's arm; and near to the house, which showed now in an opening in the wood, he met Horner returning.

"You gave my message?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the placid Horner.

"What did the gentleman say?" asked Sir Piers.

"I did not wait, sir. I thought you would not want me to wait, sir."

"You should always wait for an answer, sirrah," said Sir Piers in rebuke. "But as I am here, maybe there is no harm done," and with his cane in his hand he went forward without haste or excitement visible in his gait.

Arrived before the house, which was of no great size, but clearly of ancient design, Sir Piers rapped gently with his stick, and waited. Within there rose the baying of a hound, and from somewhere in the rear other sounds of other dogs joined in a chorus of menace. A low light streamed from the small dormer windows to one side, but there was no other sign of life. Once more he raised his stick and knocked, this time louder. The baying broke out again, but was immediately stopped by a human voice on the other side of the door. Upon that there was silence for a few seconds, and then the scuffling and breathing of a dog's nose exploring through the cracks of the door. There was also, he thought, a whisper, and after what seemed a long time, a bolt was shot back, and the door slid open, disclosing an aperture.

"Please go away," whispered a voice in the darkness, "you can do no good here. Go away, my man. Mr. Garraway is in a fit of the gout, and I know not what he will do."

"Thank you, my dear," said Sir Piers, stepping through the slit into the twilight of the hall. "That is exactly what I am curious to know and am come to find out." He put the door to behind him and turned to her. "I wonder very greatly what he will do, don't you?" and then stopped abruptly, an expression of sus-

picion transient on his face—for the girl before him was no maidservant, as he had supposed, but she whom he had seen at the Angel. On her part the girl was astonished to see him, and uttered a small cry.

"Are you—are you the gentleman who wants the chaise?" she asked in embarrassment.

"Indeed, my dear young lady, I am," replied Sir Piers, examining her keenly.

It was his boast (if indeed he could be said ever to have boasted who merely made statements) that never in his life had he been at a loss for a decision. The man's success was in large part due to this moral quality—that he made up his mind swiftly and acted at once. Here, then, had he come—with a blazing fury at his heart, and a cold, resolute purpose to make arrangements for blowing out the brains of this country bumpkin who had so insolently defied him and endeavored to belittle him in his servants' eyes. Nothing on earth could have turned him from that purpose except the sight of this girl and the reflections which she stimulated, reflections which had wandered through his mind on the previous evening at the inn, and which now came back to him with increased force. In an instant his decision was taken. From the incarnation of a grim polite Nemesis, he fell at once into the charming stranger. The old gentleman might go to the devil.

"I had hoped, madam," he said, in his suave voice, "that I might have succeeded in persuading Mr. Garraway by my personal attentions in this matter where I have unhappily failed by deputies—no doubt something coarse and inept to such tastes as his. I venture to

think that some misunderstanding has stepped between Mr. Garraway and myself, and I can promise to break my rascals' heads if that is so."

The girl was overcome during this speech by confusion, and displayed her embarrassment in her color; she also cast uneasy glances through the hall toward a door that stood open and emitted a fan of light.

"I think, sir—I hope," she began, looking very pretty in her distress; when out of the doorway she was watching stepped an older woman, who advanced some distance down the hall and stopped, gazing at the stranger. Sir Piers made a most profound bow, for he made a second discovery, which was that he had seen this lady also before. He recalled the woman who had been with the young man, and whose appearance had attracted him.

"Madam," he said, turning the channel of his talk without effort, "I have been apologizing to your daughter, as I must assume from an amazing likeness, for trespassing upon you uninvited. But indeed I have no choice. My friend is injured by an accident, and I had hopes that by private application I might beg a chaise of your kindness to carry him to Brockenhurst."

The newcomer seemed to be astonished. She dipped a courtesy to the stranger, but addressed her daughter.

"Barbara, what is this?" she demanded, in a brisk voice. "Why d'ye stand there and keep the gentleman waiting? Sir, I beg you will come in at once, out of the cold."

Ere she could go farther Barbara had met her and spoken with her. The lady's voice and manner changed.

"Sir Piers Blakiston!" she cried. "Are you Sir Piers Blakiston, sir?"

"Madam, that is my name," he answered. "I thought you had known, as I sent it by my man."

"Sent it!" she cried indignantly. "Indeed I know where it went to. I will not have it. He is too gross, and knows not how to respect us. Our honor is at stake. Sir Piers, I beg you will come in at once, and with your friend. You must be cold, la, you must. You shall drink a glass of posset or eau-de-vie. You shall so. The poor gentleman's wounds shall be looked to. I'll have it done. He shall not behave so brutish to a gentleman of good quality. You must excuse my husband, sir—he is in a fit of gout, and loses his temper. He cannot have known who you were."

"No doubt, madam, no doubt," murmured Sir Piers sympathetically, "and with the gout, too. Mr. Garraway has my sympathy. In my friend's name as well as in my own I thank you," and opening the door again, he called into the night:

"Harry, here is haven at last—almost, madam, had I said heaven," he added gallantly to the ladies by him.

The younger of these continued to show signs of uneasiness, for all her mother's air of authority. It was only too plain to the observant eyes of Sir Piers that she was in fear of an outbreak from the Squire. And indeed, Horner, with Captain Miles on his arm, had scarce crossed the threshold when the gray-haired, ruddy-faced man they had encountered at the inn hobbled into the hall and raised a harsh voice in oaths.

"Damme, Lucy!" he cried. "Spit me quick, what's this?"

"Faugh!" murmured Sir Piers to the Captain. "Here is the hogpen and the hog. Did I not tell you so?" and he flicked his perfumed handkerchief before his nose, as if he would arrest the passage of an odor.

"These gentlemen, Mr. Garraway"—began his wife, but was not suffered to go further. The Squire swore deeper than ever.

"Did I not tell you I would not have 'em?" he demanded in a fury. "Did I not send 'em"——

"Sir," said Sir Piers, in his finest manner, "you did indeed send word of a civil regret that you were unable to loan me a carriage for the conveyal of my unfortunate friend. But, being forewarned of your courtesy, and supposing therefore that my petition must have been open to some misinterpretation, owing, doubtless, to the stupidity of my messengers, I have made bold to come myself with Captain Miles to ask your aid in an unlooked-for predicament."

This suave and deliberate speech had various effects upon the audience. Mrs. Garraway beamed pleasantly on the speaker, who with a wave of his white hand had included her gracefully in the address; Barbara stared with interest at him; and as for the Squire, his face was the field of many changes. At the mere tone he was astonished, having expected to be met in quite another spirit, by one as furious as himself: the references to his "civil regrets" made him open his mouth; and finally, at the name Captain Miles he started.

"Any relation of Lord Beverley?" he asked, pointing a finger at the Captain.

"I have reason to believe that Captain Miles is the eldest son of Lord Beverley," replied Sir Piers somewhat stiffly, being unable to understand how any mere nobleman should be of more importance than the most notable buck in town.

"The Honorable Harry Miles?" queried the Squire, still looking at the Captain and paying Sir Piers no heed.

"That is my name, sir," said the Captain.

"Damme, 'tis lucky," says the Squire, breaking into a grin. "'Tis lucky it's you. Lord Beverley's son Harry! Why, Lord Beverley was at school with me, and I kicked 'un forty years since. I'm glad I did not fly out. I was just in time, eh, Lucy? Come in, gentlemen; stap me, come in. And see you, Barbara, fetch a brace of goblets and some real eau-de-vie; we shall drink to this meeting, Captain; so we shall, gentlemen. Come in, come in."

"Papa," said Barbara, "the gentleman is wounded."

"Wounded, Harry!" murmured Sir Piers. "Damn it, man, you get sympathy on false pretenses. I shall have to explain, if you have not the honesty to do so yourself."

"'Tis a blow and a kick only," said the Captain, with blunt politeness. "In overturning, the chaise struck my head and has twisted an ankle. There is no harm done. I regret to put you to inconvenience," and his eyes lingered on Barbara.

"'Tis lucky, 'tis lucky," said the Squire. "Come in

and welcome," and he limped toward the inner door from which he had emerged, followed by the strangers, Sir Piers in affable talk with Mrs. Garraway. But ere they reached the door of the room, and when they were under the light of the swinging lamp in that black oak hall, Miss Barbara uttered a little cry of dismay and alarm.

"What is it?" asked her mother impatiently.

"Blood," she said indistinctly. "It is all red—the Captain's arm."

Captain Harry Miles turned red of face also, and uncomfortably shifted his arm, making an effort to hide it behind him away from prying feminine eyes. He looked very bluff and awkward, and grew still more so when Mrs. Garraway pounced upon him in a fuss, crying that she would have a physician out of Lymington.

"Oh, pish, madam," said he stiffly, "'tis no harm. A little letting of blood will do me good."

"Captain Miles is practicing for the war," observed Sir Piers. "He is to go on service, and wants to know the color of his blood, which you will admit is very natural, madam."

Mrs. Garraway looked at him, as if uncertain of his meaning, for these were new ways of talk to her; but she had read of Sir Piers Blakiston, and there was no doubt that he was a very clever gentleman as well as the prime favorite of royalty. So she broke into a laugh, but insisted on tending the wounded wrist all the same. She dispatched Barbara for a basin of warm water and a linen bandage, and when she was come back, and the gentlemen were seated at ease in the large chairs of the Squire's room with glasses before them, and Barbara's

pretty head was bent near her mother's over the poor arm, it must be said that Sir Piers's annoyance had some justification. It was, for one thing, ridiculous that the Honorable Harry Miles should usurp a position which belonged of right to Sir Piers Blakiston, namely that of preëminence in the public eye. Between his injury and his relation to some God-forgotten peer it seemed that the Captain must take up the attentions of all three—the Squire, his wife, and her daughter. Yet he surveyed the scene with benign indifference, sipped of his eau-de-vie, and complimented his host upon its admirable bouquet and flavor.

"Aye, a main good liquor," says the Squire knowingly.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" said Sir Piers, and added thoughtfully, "I have tasted none so good since I had the honor of receiving a dozen from the Duke of York. His Royal Highness has infamous taste in most things, but he is a judge of wine and liquor. This is maybe contraband, Mr. Garraway?"

"Sir!" called out the Squire, choleric at once. "What d'ye mean? This is good honest spirit that has paid the King's duty and comes from London to Lymington by schooner."

"Indeed," said Sir Piers coolly. "I had fancied that you must have such excellent stuff from the same place as the Duke, and his, as we all know, is smuggled."

The Squire regarded him suspiciously. "I would not drink of your damned French brandies," he said sullenly.

"An excellent resolve, my friend," said Blakiston.

"Stick to your London brandy, if it be as good as this. For my part, when I take a pint of Burgundy I feel as if it would choke me. To so patriotic a pitch are we all come, including my dear friend, Harry Miles here, who is to bleed for his country, where he now bleeds for an abominable innkeeper. And now, sir, if you would be so good," he continued, observing still the two women about the Captain, "perhaps I may borrow of you a chaise in which to return."

"Shay!" said Squire Garraway. "Why, and welcome to Lord Beverley's son; but not yet, sir, not yet. Have some more eau-de-vie. I'll warrant you can stand it this chill night. It is as good as the Duke of York's, say you? I am glad. I never clapped an eye on him. But if what they say is true, he's got a number of pretty tastes, so he has. Ha! ha!" and he winked at Sir Piers with prodigious unction.

"I regret, sir, that His Royal Highness has not always been—discreet, shall I say," remarked the baronet. "I will, if I may, drink another glass of this fine spirit. To the hospitality of Hampshire," he said, looking about him, "and to the beauty of its women."

"I will drink that myself," said the Squire, in good humor. "You're right, sir. There's some rare good looks in the country; what say you, Lucy, eh?"

Mrs. Garraway, who had completed her ministrations to the abashed Captain, tossed her head with gentle archness, and Barbara's eyes were now full upon Sir Piers, as if she were arrested by his magnificent air.

"Come, sir, sit down," pursued the Squire, and pulled his own chair nearer the fire, turning his back,

thereby, on his wife and daughter. "Fetch the Captain's chair forward, Barbara. Lucy, help the Captain to brandy, and then get ye gone both." He waited impatiently while his instructions were being obeyed, though it was the Captain who pushed his own chair forward; and then, as if eager to begin, broke out, "You're from town, gentlemen, lately. What is't I hear of the Duke and Mrs. Clarke, hey?" He was clearly anxious for the women to be gone. "Come, Lucy," he said irritably, and Sir Piers for the instant bit his lip, for it appeared as if he must lie exposed to the ignorance and rusticity of this common fellow without compensation. The Squire had been seized of an appetite for spiced gossip. His eyes twinkled at the suggestions in his mind.

"There was that about Mrs. Clarke," he said, and grinned.

"Faith, sir," responded Sir Piers negligently, "I see you are better posted in town talk than myself. Who is Mrs. Clarke?"

The Squire's jaw dropped and his gaze hardened. "Why," he says, "the Duke's—pink me, you're quizzing," and to his daughter morosely, "Bait the fire, Barbara—these be London manners, hey?"

He smoked in silence now, and Sir Piers, remembering his purpose and also recovering his sense of humor, made haste to soothe the irascible gentleman.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Garraway," he said, in his full tones, as soon as mother and daughter were gone, "but I took leave to draw a herring across the scent. There are things very grave hanging on Mrs. Clarke."

"Why, is that so?" said the Squire, looking very important. "I'm sorry to hear it. I'm against no man amusing himself. The Prince of Wales is a main good hand at that, they tell me, sir," he said, grinning appreciatively at Sir Piers.

"The Prince," said Sir Piers slowly, "has his privileges, as well as his responsibilities."

"He's getting on in years, is His Highness," pursued the Squire, his tongue now loose and wagging; "why, I don't overtop him by more than ten years, eh? He's no cockerel, is the Prince. Stap me, I recall 'un in 'eighty-four, I do, when there was a wager with George Hangers about a goose race and turkeys. I was laid at Epsom with a lame leg, that a huff of cattle went over, and 'twas the laugh of the town when the news came that George Hangers' turkeys were all roosting in the trees, and were beaten, damme, by Berkeley's geese!" The Squire roared at the recollection, and Sir Piers joined him in a gentle laughter. His host was in an excellent temper, but he was anxious to get away. Miss Barbara had gone, and he was in no mood to endure the Squire's company for long. He stifled a yawn, and rose.

"And now, sir, if I may so far trespass on your indulgence, the chaise," he said.

The Squire, pulled up in the middle of his enjoyment, looked at him stupidly. "Oh, the shay," he said, and stumbling to the wall, rang a bell, the sound of which brought in a maid. To her he gave instructions.

"I can loan you a vinney mare," he said to Sir Piers.

"I thank you, sir, but our horses are still sound, I

believe," he answered, "and I shall hope to return the carriage this night."

"Oh, fiddle-de-dee," said the Squire good-naturedly.

"Well, to-morrow, sir," said Blakiston, mighty civil, "and perhaps I may be allowed simultaneously to bring my thanks for courtesy and kindness extended to me."

"Oh, damn courtesy and kindness," said the Squire bluffly. "Ye're welcome, if only for Lord Beverley's sake."

Out in the road, as the chaise left the lights of the house behind, Sir Piers stared out at the falling rain in meditation.

"What think you of miss, Harry?" he asked, setting himself back in his cushions.

"Why, a mighty pretty girl," said the Captain heartily.

"Pretty!" said Sir Piers. "Egad, 'tis a tame sound. She has eyes that would bore holes in London town. She needs but a course under some cunning hand to dress herself. Faith, she carries herself well enough. Pretty! She is a devilish fine beauty in the egg."

CHAPTER III

SOME PISTOL PRACTICE

Sir Piers Blakiston rose the next morning in an excellent temper. The Rose and Crown was a comfortable and modest inn, where he was able to enjoy a respectable bottle of port and honest English fare. The enforced delay in the wilds of Hampshire, instead of irritating this seasoned Londoner, had seemed to stimulate him. He rallied the Captain at breakfast, made no complaint of the "ham and eggs," and even remarked pleasantly upon the weather—a most amazing thing in him. To Sir Piers, and such as he, it mattered very little whether it rained or snowed or blew a gale, or whether the sun floated bright and warm in heaven. Just now, when life was creeping slowly to birth in the old brown earth, and spring was for the first time noticeably asserting itself over the winter, delicious thrills of anticipation might very well quicken the hearts of more sensitive beings. The beau was as hard and unimpressionable as a stone wall. London and his own round of fashionable life were all that mattered to him, and that round went on (provided he was in town) whatever the weather might be, and in the months of fall and decay as well as in the bourgeoning springtime. Yet here was he, kept out of town by a wretched mischance, and smiling amiably through it all. Captain Miles stared at him in astonishment.

"I have ordered a chaise for eleven, Blakiston," he said. "They have fair horses, and at least we shall make Winchester."

"Then, Harry, you shall please countermand 'em," says Sir Piers, cracking the top of his egg.

His companion gaped. "What!" he cried.

"I cannot leave without discharging a courtesy which is thrust on me," pursued Sir Piers. "I am surprised, my dear Miles, to find you thinking of such a thing. It would be base ingratitude. You will be good enough to have the horses in, and we will drive to thank our good host, Mr. Garraway, for his hospitality last night, and his generous loan. We will then return him his loan."

"Oh, very well, we can do that on the way," said the Captain cheerfully.

"Observe, my dear Miles, that it is not on the way," remarked Sir Piers gently; "we must return after the visit to this very comfortable inn."

Miles eyed him thoughtfully for a moment in silence, and then guffawed. "Gad's my life, Blakiston, I believe ye're hooked by the village beauty," he cried. "'Tis a case of Cupid's bow, eh?" and appeared to find this an immoderate jest.

Sir Piers finished his egg calmly and then put up his quizzing glass. "I would I had your sense of humor, Harry," he said pleasantly. "Gad, how it would divert me to be tickled by so little! The buck of the town to be trapped and catched by a rustic Audrey! Lord, how amusing it would be to laugh at that! I would I could find some enemy of mine at the foolish

game. I would guarantee, my dear Miles, that he would be roasted to death in London. But I suppose, Harry, you are more merciful, and will let me go scot-free. You are not threatening me, Harry?"

At this Miles looked a little foolish and not a little uncomfortable.

"Damn it!" he said in protest. "You know you admired the girl."

"True, O great observer," responded the baronet. "When you are come to your kingdom, Miles, you will do great things. A fresh pink face is all you saw, my friend, turned redder, by the way, in that same attitude of devotion over a poor soldier, wounded in the wars."

"The devil take you!" growled Miles, changing his color.

"In his good time, Harry, not just now," said Sir Piers equably. "I say you see a pink, fresh face. So do I, my troth, but there is more in it than that. The proper complexion, my dear sir, is for a maid something 'twixt clean oatmeal and blush rose. There is no term for it—language is gross and stumbles. You may say it is drunk and hiccoughs. Most of our poets are mere hiccoughs from Parnassus. Well, I pretend not to poetry, only to the recognition of beauty when I see it. And I say there's more than pink fresh faces go to beauty. A texture, a color, a contour, a divination, a—a denial and refusal of things deemed pretty, doubtless, in mere pretty faces—there's your beauty, or rather mine, and in Miss Barbara Garraway it is implicit." He turned to his friend. "Harry," he said, laughing, "you were best married to a dairymaid, your proper

mate. This rustic, as you call her, is beyond you, as high beyond as the angels."

"Oh, she's a pretty enough piece," said the Honorable Harry Miles, who had listened to this without distress. "But may I be shot if I know what you're about."

"Very likely, Harry—not at all unlikely," said Sir Piers. "But I would call your attention back to the rustic, bred in the hogpen. A complexion is very well. I have usually found 'em best in London, but here's an exception. The country as a rule washes and dries 'em too fast. They rot, and should wear rouge and powder. There's where our town madams fail. They can dispense with such ceremonies and precautions, and know it not! Lord, were I not Sir Piers Blakiston, I would be Beauty's agent and make a fortune. A complexion, I say, is well enough, but who would die for a complexion? Not I, Harry; certainly not you, and—and—I do not think—the Prince."

"The Prince!" said Captain Miles, staring at him stupidly.

"Why, do you not think Miss Barbara would grace a Court, Miles?" asked Sir Piers. "I fear you have no imagination. A blunt fellow like yourself has no time for such graces, and no taste for them. But still, if you will look at it, Harry, what more can you ask than a delicate spirit of fire, that face of broken lights, a quick inquiring eye, and the very devil of denial in every tip of the chin? She tantalizes, she taunts one with one's failures. Upon my soul, I have seen none these ten years, not since Lady Betty, to vie with her. Oh, I

can see beyond that rural habit, and I bless her shyness. Believe me, she's little shy behind. 'Tis only the proper modicum—a pinch for a protection and for a provocation also. A damnable adorable beautiful miss—as His Royal Highness would agree."

"You fetch the Prince in," growled Miles, who was being irritated by these enthusiastic monologues. "What's he to do with it?"

"Harry, I will take snuff for once—an odious habit. But this country air— The Prince, my dear sir," said Sir Piers, snuffing, "the Prince would delight to see so lovely a lady at Court, and no doubt there is some benevolent lady who would equally delight to pleasure her by the introduction. His Royal Highness will grow dull, Harry. I notice it in him."

"He's growing old," said Miles bluntly.

Sir Piers held up a hand in horror. "My dear sir," he said, deprecating, "he is but ten years older than myself. But yet, you're right. Above forty—" He heaved a sigh and then went on more briskly: "Well, 'tis an extra reason that we should be kind to him ere he tumble into the tomb. He would admire Miss Barbara vastly. He is accustomed to follow my taste without question."

Captain Miles shrugged his shoulders as if he would thereby express a certain contempt for His Royal Highness, and he rose.

"I see," he said grimly. "Then, you will stay here to-night?"

"I need not keep you, Harry," returned Sir Piers, looking at him steadfastly.

"I? Oh, I will stay," said Miles indifferently. "I may as well be here as in town. I shall not be wanted for a month or more. And there is some hunting in the Forest, they say."

"Very well, my dear Miles, let us both go a-hunting," said Sir Piers gravely; "and now, if you will order the chaise, I will dress myself," with which, although he was neatly enough attired, he called for his man to attend him.

Harry Miles found him at eleven o'clock seated before the inn, in the occupation of firing with a pistol at marked stones in the road. Sir Piers was a notable shot, and assiduously practiced his art in his idle moments. He sat now in the most elegant suit of clothes, a shining pistol in his long fingers, and an expression, which he wore like a mask, of blank indifference; while the hostler, the waiter, and some stray villagers looked on and applauded his skill, as the bullets struck the white marks. While he was engaged in this business a horseman cantered up to the inn, and leaped briskly from his saddle. The newcomer was of good stature and frank, handsome face, and had about him an air of eagerness, as it were, of one that anticipates or hopes, or, at least, might be feverishly occupied with affairs. He stood with the bridle over his arm, watching the scene, and it flashed upon Captain Miles that the face had passed before him on some other occasion. In this he was right, for the young man was he who had accosted Sir Piers on the jetty when the packet came to shore.

Sir Piers loaded both his pistols and called, without turning his head, for his man Horner.

"Horner," said he, when that sleek fellow was before him, "take one of those stones, walk thirty yards, and hold it up in your hand."

"Yes, sir," said Horner, without emotion, and obeyed. At that distance he halted, turned about, and put up a hand.

"Well in your palm, man, well in your palm—not at fingers' end," called his master.

Horner shifted the stone into his palm, and clutched it with his finger-nails over the edge. Sir Piers lifted a pistol slowly and fired as it came to the level of his eye. A murmur of applause went up from the group, which had now swollen in size and numbers. The bullet had kicked a splinter from the very center of the stone.

"Bravo!" cried the young man with the horse. "By Gad, well shot!"

Sir Piers paid no heed to this, nor to the ebullition of enthusiasm among the other spectators; he seemed quite unconscious that there was anyone else save himself and his valet present. He made a gesture with his arm, and Horner returned to him. Sir Piers gave him another stone, upon which a bull's-eye had been chalked, and the man went back to his post as mechanically as ever. Out moved the arm like an automatic semaphore, and Horner's eyes were dutifully directed to the "front," as if he were on drill. He stood at attention, with one outstretched arm, and in his palm the stone, upon which the tips of the fingers were visible. Sir Piers, with even less consideration than before, lifted his pistol and fired. Horner's arm fell swiftly, and a cry sprang to the lips of the young man.

"Good God, you've hit him!" he exclaimed.

"Did you speak, Horner?" asked Sir Piers, looking up from his pistol.

"No, sir," said Horner, with a face silent but working with pain.

"Man, don't you see he's hit? It's taken him on the nail," declared the impetuous horseman, moving nearer to both. Sir Piers did not even cast a glance at him, but motioned his valet to come and take the pistols.

"Damme," said the young horseman indignantly, "this is sheer devilment—it's malicious cruelty, by Gad!"

One of the spectators had picked up the stone which the unfortunate Horner had dropped, and was examining it. A little crowd surrounded him. The margin was stained with blood, but in the center of the chalked bull's-eye was the mark and dint of the bullet.

"He's hit 'un, for sure," said the center of the group. "It's like that it ran off on his finger-tips. He's split his nail, I reckon."

Red with his honest fury, the horseman pushed up to Sir Piers and confronted him.

"Are you not aware, sir, that this man's thumb is torn by your damned sport?" he demanded. His fury, which was originally born of a sensitive sympathy with pain natural to him, had been redoubled by his own insolent treatment. This arrogant man had not deigned to notice his remarks. He stood, an angry, even a menacing figure, in front of the baronet. That elegant buck let his eyes go coldly over the young man's face, and

down to his cravat and coat. There they stayed a little, without any expression, and traveled finally to the ruffles of the country dress, where they left him altogether.

"Horner," he said, with a note of languor, "will you tell Captain Miles that I have been waiting him for some five minutes overtime?"

"Yes, sir," said Horner, and turned rapidly away. In the distance he saw his master's friend approaching, but ere reaching him put his thumb in his mouth, and twisted his face awry.

"Well, Horner, is your master ready?" inquired the Captain, when he had come up. Horner's hand went to his hat.

"Yes, sir, been ready five minutes, sir, Sir Piers asked me to say."

"The devil he has," said Harry Miles. "Why, I left him practicing with his pistol. Hulloa, my man, what's the matter with your thumb?"

"Accident, sir—a slight accident," said Horner promptly.

"A damned nasty slit! Go get it tended, you fool," was the Captain's good-natured advice.

"Thank you, sir," said Horner.

When Captain Miles got to the inn, he found a very red-faced, turbulent young man performing about Sir Piers, who was cool and unemotional. The stranger addressed him.

"Who is this, sir? Will you be good enough to tell me this man's name, sir?" he demanded.

And then Captain Miles recognized him.

"Harry, are you ready?" asked Sir Piers reproach-

fully, looking as if there were no indignant stranger at hand. "I have been waiting quite ten minutes, and I am especially anxious not to be late."

"I shall be in your debt, sir," said the young man, with a civil bow and a deadly glitter in his eye, "if you will be good enough to inform me who this gentleman is."

"He is Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone," said Harry Miles, with a grin.

"I thank you, sir," declared the stranger politely, "and my name in turn is Faversham, sir, Faversham of Disney House, by Ringwood."

"I have no use for your name, Mr. Faversham," said blunt Miles.

"I will ask you to recall it, sir, if maybe you shall hear it again sometime."

"Harry, the chaise," said Sir Piers pettishly, and at that moment the postilion appeared leading the horses. With a sigh of relief, Sir Piers arose from his seat, and walked toward the carriage. The Captain, after an amused stare at Mr. Faversham, followed with a little nod of indulgent courtesy, and behind came poor Horner with a valise belonging to the baronet. In a little the chaise was bowling along the road toward Setley Heath.

"I have his name," said Mr. Faversham to himself, still furious, "and I will not forget it. I dare say I shall run across him some day," with which he threw his reins to the hostler, and entered the house for a morning draft of ale.

Meanwhile the chaise rolled over the heath and reached Boldre, close by which the house and farms of

Moyden Manor were buried in the Forest. The air was fine and thrilled the blood, the sun was warm, the sky like a blue and empty ceiling, and the light glittered on the bare trees. At the orders of Sir Piers, the chaise drew up near the gate of a meadow through which his sharp eyes had discerned the Squire and his daughter moving. He descended, and, opening the gate, advanced to meet them, hat in hand.

"I have done myself the pleasure, Mr. Garraway," he said, in the tone which had moved London to admiration, "to return the chaise in person, in order to convey you my thanks for your great kindness."

"Is't Captain Miles ye've got there?" demanded the Squire bluntly, cutting him short.

"It is Captain Miles," assented Sir Piers coldly.

The Squire made no reply, but strode on quickly toward the road, and, with a small shrug of his shoulders, as if he would thereby dismiss this creature from his mind, Sir Piers turned his attention to Barbara, who was visiting his face with shy glances. The Squire reached the road, and entered into talk with Lord Beverley's son. He called back to Sir Piers loudly.

"Come in, sir; follow us in and drink a cup. I ha' been up since five and about, and could drink a barrel. Fetch 'un in, Barbara, and Captain Miles and me will go on."

This arrangement suited Sir Piers very admirably; if he might have the girl, Harry was welcome to the old rustic. He donned his finest manner, and quizzed her through his glass with an amiable smile.

"And you, Miss Garraway," he asked, examining

He advanced to meet them.

her. "Is't early hours fetch that delicate color to your face?"

The color deepened. "Nay," she said, tossing her head and laughing. "But I am not industrious, like papa. I do not milk the cows, sir, as you might suppose."

Sir Piers was faintly disconcerted, for although he had not supposed that she milked cows, he was sharp enough to note her roguish raillery.

"I had hoped you did," he said reflectively. "I have not to my knowledge seen a cow, but I should greatly like to see one milked."

"Our Jill will do that for you, and welcome, sir," said Barbara archly, mocking him.

"No, no," he murmured softly, shaking his head with decision and regarding her with a friendly smile. "Miss Garraway, it is not Jill I would see. I can see Jills at every turn and corner of life. Jill walks before me down the Mall, and Jill, I have no doubt, fetches the milk to my door in the early morning. Jill tends my boots—no, 'tis Horner, by the way, does that; but Jill at least has my linen in charge. She's an admirable person, is Jill, clean of hand, pert of mind, and blunt of feature, but, my dear Miss Garraway, I have no reason in the world to consider Jill or throw a thought on her. She is the machine."

"Indeed, Sir Piers," protested the young lady, smiling, "you would not pay her such unhandsome compliments, if you saw our Jill."

"She is pretty, is she?" asked he, with an amiable affectation of interest.

"She is very squat and flat of face, and she has a large hand and a short temper," she declared, now showing the upper row of her even teeth in her amusement.

"I see you threaten," he said indulgently, and admired at his leisure the vivacity of her face. He was not quite decided how best to handle her, whether in the ways of town, or as some rural beauty who would surrender at once to the blandishments of so great a man, or again as a delicate miss, who must be gently and cautiously plied. And so, though he was at his ease, he was slow in opening, and even a little cumbrous. The note of gayety in her, however, encouraged him down one path, and he proceeded on a more familiar but still delicate footing.

"There was that in you struck me at the first, Miss Garraway," he explained airily. "Doubtless you may have seen how I was flustered two days ago at the Angel. But there was a very mighty strange resemblance in you, and for the instant I thought here was a ghost that walked. Yet the next moment it was no ghost, but a creature of life and beauty, and the hallucination was gone."

"Was it someone I recalled?" she asked, flushing slightly, and with evident curiosity.

"A lady that is dead," he said, bowing his head, "one that I was privileged to know and admire. A great lady, and now no more—dead in her youth and splendor, Miss Garraway, that youth and splendor which means so much and runs from us so fast away."

"How sad!" she sighed, and then a little timidly:

"Was she at Court, sir? My mother tells me you are at Court."

"I have the honor to be welcome, as I truly believe, at His Majesty's Court," assented Sir Piers magnificently, "but maybe with greater warmth and spirit about the Prince's person. His Royal Highness has honored me with his friendship, and, indeed, I may say that we have on several occasions been of use to one another, as good friends should be. I am greatly in His Royal Highness's debt," he declared, with splendid humility.

Barbara's eyes glowed on him; he was not only a fine, handsome man, wonderfully dressed, but he was a figure in the world, held the secrets of princes, and was arm-in-arm with royal dukes. He dismayed and attracted her, and she marveled that she could have spoken so lightly to him a little before. She longed to press him with interrogations, to ask of the unfortunate Princess, of Mrs. Fitzherbert, of Lady Jersey, of others whose names she knew and with whose histories she was partly familiar. Instead she sighed.

"I have never been but once in town," she said; "but I was at school at Bath, and I have seen the beaux and fine ladies trooping there when I was a little girl."

"My dear child," said Sir Piers indulgently, smiling, "as a seat of social ceremonies Bath perished in the year 'eighty-five, and," he added, "I take you for eighteen years. Am I right?"

"I am turned nineteen," she said, still regarding with curiosity this elegant gentleman, whom in her mind she was disposed to associate in age with her father.

"Nineteen!" he said. "Well, Miss Garraway, we must have you in town some day. We cannot let such flowers waste in wayside places. There are two towns only, and one is London and the other Brighton. We must have you plucked to adorn the one or the other."

He glanced at her furtively from under lowered eyelids as he spoke, emphasizing the word "plucked" with a little sharpness of voice. The emphasis, hinting, as she interpreted it, at marriage and a grand destiny in town, drew color to her cheek again, which was intensified under the observation of his eyes. It was not an offensive gaze; it was mild, but critical, appraising as one might think, and approbatory; it was as if the London beau looked her over as quietly and privately as possible, and "passed" her. At all events, this was what Sir Piers desired to convey to her, and this, amid the agitation and confusion of her mind, was vaguely what she felt. Their arrival at the house checked the conversation, and there was the Squire's hearty invitation to meat.

"Welcome in, sir, and drink a glass of something. Lord! I am thirsty as in midsummer, and we're not so far as Beaulieu Fair yet. Barbara, bid Polly fetch me two quart of the old brew. Gentlemen, what say you? What will you drink?"

Miles nodded at the mention of the ale, but Sir Piers hesitated. "If I might make bold, sir," he said, "a small glass of that excellent eau-de-vie that——"

"Barbara, the brandy," broke in the Squire, without ceremony, "the brandy for this gentleman here."

He took his pot at a draft, and smacked his lips.

"I was all in a sweat down by the Holt," he continued to the company generally, "all in a sweat over a hog that burrowed under and got into the Forest. Phew, gentlemen! 'tis hot work minding your own hogs, with that lazy devil Jackson still asleep in his bed."

"Hogs," whispered Sir Piers to his friend Miles, "did I not warn you of hogs, Harry?"

"Drink up, gentlemen," insisted the Squire; "drink your brandy, Sir Piers, and have another. Pish, man! there's nothing in a glass like that. They're my wife's fancy, but I would not be seen with one in my hand. They're for children and puling women."

"You work your own farm, sir?" inquired the baronet.

"Aye, work it I do," returned the Squire, lighting his pipe. "There's not money enough in the country since these Boney wars for a gentleman to live on, there isn't. I work my farm and hunt my hounds like a gentleman, and damn the Whigs, I say."

"People are mostly of that pious opinion, sir," said Sir Piers, "save, perhaps, the Prince."

"Ah," says the Squire, looking at him and then at Miles. "You gentlemen must know a lot about the Prince, hey? There's a lot we could know about him. His Majesty has quarreled with him again, they tell me, hey?"

"His Majesty," said Sir Piers, "has unhappily never quite recognized the good qualities and the unfortunate position of His Royal Highness."

"Unfortunate position!" giggled the Squire. "I should ha' liked his unfortunate position, so I should.

Lord! the tales I have heard of him. You can tell me, Captain—" he began, and broke off. "You begone, Barbara. We want no chit of a girl about here. We are not talking for girls' ears, eh, gentlemen?"

"Surely, sir," said Sir Piers, "Miss Barbara should be interested to learn of the high character and conduct of her future king."

"Eh?" said the Squire, somewhat confounded in his slow brain, and gazing at the speaker with a little suspicion. Then his ideas returned. "But we want to talk," he said. "We want no slip of a young woman listening to our talk."

At this point the door opened and Mrs. Garraway made her appearance, a figure still elegant, pleasantly clad, and with the keys of the housewife at her girdle. Sir Piers made her a deep salute, which seemed to please her.

"I did not know, sir," she began, "that we were to be honored by a second call from you."

"He's come to return the shay," pronounced the Squire.

"But, indeed," said the lady, "I hope you have quite finished with it, Sir Piers. And I trust Captain Miles has recovered his hurt"—she cast a glance at him as she spoke. "We are not so often fortunate as to be able to assist even in a small way gentlemen whose names are so well known. Your repute is quite familiar, Sir Piers," she assured him.

"Damme, I never heard his name," growled the Squire.

"And very rightly, sir," said Sir Piers, who had

overheard this undertone. "My friend, Harry Miles, is a soldier, who has already done good service for his country, and will yet do more. As for myself, I only claim to be a simple man who is, against his deserts, honored by the friendship of the Prince. That is a private matter between him and myself, and I should be loath to think it was bruited abroad."

"But, la, Sir Piers, there is plenty of tales told of you," persisted the lady archly. "I have heard some of Lady Garnet, whom I think you know."

Sir Piers considered. "I should like to know her as a friend of yours, madam," he said, with vast civility, "but I must confess I cannot recall— Stay; is she tall, of a thin face and large eyes, somewhere near five-and-thirty?"

"Oh, la, no," declared Mrs. Garraway, in surprise and amusement. "She is stout, and owns to more years than I, sir."

"Ah, true," said he, nodding, as though he had remembered. "It was of the Countess of Keswick I was thinking—either the Countess or the Duchess of Armagh. I never can distinguish between them. They are so much alike in their dullness, in their plainness, and in their importunity. I always remember the Duke, however; he is a fine fellow and a good companion. I have played with him all night at Brooks's."

"Fie!" said Mrs. Garraway, reproaching him with smiles. "I do not approve of gaming and dice. You gentlemen of fashion should set a better example. But then—who am I to preach you lessons! Mr. Garraway, have you given Sir Piers a morning cup?"

"He has had two," chuckled the Squire. "He has a fine stomach for spirit. That's what the high fashion teaches him."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Garraway, in great complacency, "Sir Piers, I hope you are come to stay to dinner. The hour is getting on, and we shall be ready soon."

She beamed on him, and he bowed with a tiny smile of acknowledgment. "I thank you, Mrs. Garraway," he said; "I would it had been possible. But, indeed, I have made an engagement already. I took the chance of returning the chaise in person, yet I fear I have lingered too long already."

"Ah!" she cried, with a note of disappointment, "you are but a bird of passage. You are too great for us country folk. We shall see you no more, then."

Sir Piers looked at Miles and then back to his hostess. He spoke deliberately. "I am very much afraid," he said, "that you are not quit of us yet. Some matter of business has arisen which keeps me here for a little, in a country place which I confess I had not deemed could be so pleasant."

The Captain's face was expressive of certain simple emotions which might very well have been recognized by anyone who had been watching him. But the eyes of the two women were for Sir Piers only, while the Squire was examining his quart pot. Mrs. Garraway sensibly bridled.

"I trust you will honor us by dining another day, Sir Piers," she made haste to say, and this invitation Sir Piers accepted with his gracious air of conferring

a favor. He then turned to go, being well aware when to leave an impression to sink in the mind, and not desiring to seem to show too much appreciation of this rustic family. As he moved, the door was flung open and a young man appeared, who was heartily greeted over their heads by the Squire.

"Come in, Gilbert Faversham," he cried, in his harsh voice. "Come in. Here's two strange gentlemen visiting us, and one's Lord Beverley's son. You remember me speaking of him?"

Sir Piers turned about, and saw entering the room the same young man who had caused him some annoyance by his officious interference not two hours since. He made no sign of recognition, though Faversham looked at him. The newcomer saluted Mrs. Garraway and Barbara with a fine show of manly vigor, smiling and displaying his white teeth. He had the air of being almost too vigorous for the room, an air in curious contrast with Miles's equally athletic and even more sturdy form. When he had so done his gaze came back to the strangers.

"Here's two gentlemen from Court, lad," said the Squire, in his uncouth country accent.

"I have met these gentlemen before," he said curtly.

"Indeed, sir," said Sir Piers, putting up his glass and making an appearance of studying him. "I think—I fancy—if I am not mistaken, there is some error."

"I saw you at the inn at Brockenhurst, you and your friend, this morning," broke out the young Faversham, with some heat. "You're Sir Piers Blakiston."

Sir Piers nodded. "True," he said, dropping his glass. "You may have seen me there. The innkeeper knew my name. I fancied that you had referred to some meeting in town," with which majestic display of indifference he bowed once more to the company and withdrew in the Captain's company.

CHAPTER IV

SIR PIERS BAITS HIS HOOK

Sir Piers Blakiston's extraordinary decision to remain at the Rose and Crown, a petty hostelry with no conveniences such as a tried and seasoned Londoner demanded, occupied Captain Miles's curiosity. He himself had no distaste for the country; on the contrary, he had already been offered some good hunting by the Squire, and had almost been tempted to accept it. That was before he heard his friend's deliberate statement as to his intention to remain. Harry Miles looked forward now to some sport, for which pursuit he was physically and mentally well equipped. But Sir Piers, who never hunted—what amusement would he find in the place, unless, indeed, it was true, after all, that he had surrendered to the charms of Miss Garraway? Though the Captain remembered the enthusiasm with which his companion had described the points of the girl, and adumbrated her distinction, he could neither see for himself the remarkable qualities discovered in what appeared to him merely an uncommon, pretty girl, nor quite believe that Sir Piers was not sarcastic at his expense. He was never really aware how far his friend was serious, and when his questions on this occasion met with enigmatic or ironic answers, he gave up the puzzle. There was a good deal in Sir Piers's life and character which a

plain man did not understand, and the Honorable Harry Miles was not likely to be at the bother of solving the riddle.

"My dear Miles," said the baronet amiably, "I begin to feel that the country holds much for us townsfolk which I had not thought. I enjoy the manifold scents, the variable sight of flowers, the expanse of pure heaven, and I shall presently, no doubt, be taken by the cooing of the billing doves and the mating thrushes. Moreover, my country presents itself in a new light so far from St. James's and Carlton House. There is a simplicity which goes to my heart, something quite alien to the ordered artifice of our society. For example, what more entertaining and meritorious person than your Squire, who lives near the earth and draws his blood from it? And the daughter also! I have already expressed my opinion about Miss Barbara. I have hopes she and I may be friends."

Yet knowing how indifferent Sir Piers was as a rule to mere beauty divorced from the charm and spirit of dress and art, Captain Miles dismissed these sentiments again as mere pleasantry, and, as I have said, abandoned his speculations for the pleasanter occupation of hunting. It was during several of these excursions, upon which the Captain had the willing company of the Squire, that Sir Piers developed his intimacy with the household at Moyden.

"You will wonder why I tarry," he wrote to His Royal Highness, "and that in a place so remote from human knowledge and so destitute of human consolations. But you are wrong—there is one of these latter, and I

can see your Royal Highness's face broaden in derision when I speak of rustic beauty. I am at your mercy, sir; if you desire to spread abroad the tale, and damn Piers Blakiston at Brooks's and Brighton, I have given you the engine. Yet I conceive that you may pause and take thought, when you shall remember the coat of hardness my heart wears. I tell your Royal Highness of rustic beauty. Consider. Should I forge the very weapons against myself? You know my sentiments and my opinion of female virtue. I have lived too long to retract, even to modify. Yet the flower that grows in a hedgerow to-day may, in changed circumstances, adorn a vase in the palace to-morrow. It is all a question of circumstances. Meanwhile, if I admire who am celebrated for such coolness, how much should your Royal Highness? The question can only receive an answer in time. At present conceive me enjoying the Forest air and eating bad food. Thank God, I have my own wine at last! I hope your Royal Highness may find time to write to one who is pursuing phantoms."

The delight of Mrs. Garraway at the friendship (as she had come to call it) of the fashionable baronet was frank and honest. She was a good woman in her house, and inclined to severity by her traditions, but more formidably inclined to vanity and ambition by her sex. She blossomed anew into youth under the compliments of the beau, and could never tire of plying him with questions as to his relations with great people. He told her and her daughter tales of celebrities with a gentle indifference, and was seen by them both to be bosom intimate of at least three royal dukes, as well as to be the

adviser and confidant of a princess. He brought to that lonely Hampshire village the air and glitter of the Court, and the picture ever in Barbara's eyes was of the pomp and glory of a royal pageant, with Sir Piers Blakiston in the front and foreground, the companion of kings and the adored of grand ladies. And still he tarried, for his business in the neighborhood was still incomplete.

During this time he made little progress in the affections of the Squire, who yet had come to give him a grudging respect. His attainments were manifest, and he had a high position. He was not like the George Hangers of their day, a toady of indifferent or obscure birth and no manners. The Prince had improved on his earlier ways and his earlier companions. Moreover, his wife's attitude insensibly but materially affected the Squire, who, rough as he seemed, was open to her influence very largely. Add to these facts that Sir Piers's friend, Lord Beverley's son, was a man after his own taste, and you will see that Mr. Garraway's natural hostility to an alien character underwent modification. On the other hand, Faversham's increased daily with the reports of the baronet's intimacy with the family, and with his own suspicions and fears. He had encountered Sir Piers at the house on the day following their first meeting, and the necessary introduction was effected.

"I am delighted to know any friend of yours, Mrs. Garraway," declared the beau most urbanely, and Gilbert Faversham's defiant though somewhat arrogant manner in return did not compare well with this delightful graciousness. But Faversham was quick of temper

and hasty of judgment, and he detested the man for his fripperies as well as for his deliberate affectations. And now he developed a jealousy which was gnawing at his heart.

"Look here, Squire," said he abruptly one day when they were alone in the stables, "what does that fellow at your house so often? and what does he here at all?"

The Squire lifted his head from the hocks of a horse he had been examining, and stared stupidly.

"What's that? who d'ye mean? Oh, that chap Blakiston. May I be damned if I know what he does here. I don't want him."

"With his pretty clothes he thinks he can catch any woman's eye, I doubt not," sneered poor Faversham.

He had come from Ringwood that day, and passed Miss Barbara upon the road with the stranger, which may plead an excuse for him.

"Women!" says the Squire, with a grin, "aye, they can think of little but clothes. There's my Lucy's lost her heart over the man. Gad, she has, my boy, and is la-la-ing and fal-de-fooling all day long with Princess that and His Royal Highness this, and damme, I would kick 'un out for a pennorth of snuff," he ended, in his broadest dialect.

There was, however, little consolation in this, as Faversham was aware. He had, as a matter of fact, good ground for feeling sore at the neglect with which not only Barbara but her mother treated him. He had known the Garraways all his life, and had always been upon the footing of an intimate. An only son, he had inherited early in life a small property near Ringwood,

and this his careful mother had husbanded during the term of his minority. At twenty-five he was a healthy, good-looking, and spirited young man, fairly well-to-do, and of a better intelligence than his neighbors. He had served in the yeomanry, and was credited with being a smart soldier. When Buonaparte lay at Boulogne and the militia yeomanry and volunteers were being organized all up and down the country, Gilbert Faversham, young as he was, had been in charge of some warlike preparations at Christchurch, and returned, Ensign Gilbert, with all his honors to the arms of a proud mother. Barbara Garraway had been at Ringwood, an excited and interested witness of that triumph. She was only fourteen then, but a handsome, growing girl, with enthusiasms forever bubbling over, and the boy of twenty had begun even then to like her lively companionship. A few years bring a revolution at such an age, and at the time of this tale, the girl had grown to be the end and goal of Faversham's ambition. He had known it for some time, and she knew it also; nor had she offered any open objection to his suit. They were excellent friends, and he believed and hoped that soon they would be more, particularly as their intimacy seemed to receive the countenance of their elders.

This was why he regarded the elegant, meddling stranger with dislike, and this was why he found in the changed manner of Barbara and her mother signals of danger and reasons for fear. They seemed to be facing quite another way, even in so short a time as was marked by the sojourn of the Londoner in the Forest. Faversham could recall the moment when he had first realized

that the strange feeling he had for Barbara was what he had since determined it to be. He brought to mind also a day in midsummer of the last year, when he had dared very greatly, and had been amazed and frightened at the result. Under the trees of Brockenhurst Park, as they went down to Boldre, he had come to a pause, pointed out a squirrel in the young poplars, and then felt his heart stop. Her face, turned athwart the light of a failing sun, was luminous and lovely; of a sudden a fever took him; and, almost unaware of his act, he had seized her, and kissed her on the lips. Barbara fell away from him with a cry of terror, then stared at him with fury in her eyes, and next upon that burst into tears. The sobs shook her; she knew not what she wanted. But at the sight of those tears, and of the poor bosom rent with emotion, his limbs trembled under him and his voice quivered. He had ravaged a white lamb that would but have walked and talked with him, and dreamed not of any nearer intimacy than kindly friendship. He begged pardon with the quaver in his note, and got no answer; she averted her head; he had no comprehension of women, and, in a confusion of dread and pity and remorse, he left her and strode away through the glade. The astonishing part was that when he next met her she was by no means so distant as he had anticipated. He had looked forward with terror to the meeting, and had shunned it successfully for a fortnight. When it was inevitable, he had been possessed and overcome with discomfort, but was wonderfully surprised at his reception, as has been said. He was "Mr. Faversham," to be sure, and not "Mr. Gilbert," or "Gilbert," as it had some-

times been; but this address was given with no air of offense or distaste, merely as from one who had been obliged to retire a little farther away, but on the whole did not object to it. Encouraged by these signs, Faversham pushed the position, and was rewarded for his audacity and intelligence by a most decided rebuff, after which he sat down uncertainly and miserably to consider matters. The result of his meditations was negative, now inclining him to believe in his presumptuous theory that Barbara cared for him, and again to think her cold and unresponsive beyond the habit of women. Yet at last, by the very persistence of his affection and his constant devotion, he had won his way, or thought he had. Barbara was never asked definitely for an answer, but she grew to lean toward him, and was, if often capricious and unkind and cold, as often certainly gentle, friendly, and appreciative. They lived together, as it were, on the warm terms of relatives who are not near enough to preclude the possibility of love. In Faversham's case there was no doubt whatever as to the love. With a woman things are not so simple.

The advent of Sir Piers had, it is certain, bewildered the girl, and thrown her out of perspective. She recognized that she was not using her old friend with the consideration to which he had been accustomed, and she was aware, too, that he felt it. They did not meet so frequently, and, when they did, there was some restraint in their talk. This he had endeavored to overcome, but it can hardly be said that his attempt was satisfactory. Barbara was innocently full of the stranger's stories and sayings; she quoted him, sometimes unconsciously,

but the source of her new style was clear to jealous eyes, and moved him to deeper resentment.

"Would you like to live in town, Mr. Faversham?" she asked. "It must be wonderful to live in all that gay whirl. I should love it. There is always something in progress, routs and balls and parties, and oh, it would be delightful!"

"I find the Forest well enough," said he unresponsively.

"Ah, but it is dull. The old life goes on in a very sober way. I should like to feel myself in the center of things. Think of the fine assemblies and the beautiful dresses. I should be wearing pretty silks and wonderful costumes instead of these poor things."

"You would look beautiful in anything," he said impulsively.

"Sir Piers says," she pursued meditatively, "that the mode is changing, and that it is the coming fashion now to wear huge sleeves above the elbow, and muslin tippets about the neck. It is said they do so because of the cold, and that so many have caught their death. But,"—she looked down at her simple clinging gown, and her square open bodice, where the slight bosom showed,—"but Sir Piers says that he prefers the old mode, and that he will use his influence in its favor on his return."

"Damn the mode!" said poor Faversham, between his teeth. She had not heard. "I think, however," she added wistfully, "that I should like to try the new fashion. Everyone will be wearing it soon—unless he

stops it, of course," she added, in perfect simplicity of faith.

But this was a red rag to the unhappy young man. With his constitutional quickness of thought, he saw that the intruder had been overpowering the girl with his flatteries, and it enraged him that she should not only be exposed to these imprudent attentions, but also appreciate them.

"Who is this Sir Piers, I should like to know?" he demanded, turning on her with vehemence. "What d'ye know of him, and what does Mrs. Garraway know of him? What does he here? He is here under false pretenses, I will swear."

Barbara looked in astonishment at this outbreak. "Why," she answered, "it is well known that he is Sir Piers Blakiston, a friend of the Prince of Wales, and an intimate about Court. He is very well known," she pursued emphatically, "and as for what he does here, indeed, Mr. Faversham, it is his own business, I suppose," ending this upon a note of coldness and with a metaphorical toss of her head.

"His own business!" he sneered, carried beyond himself. "Yes, and what's that? To put foolish ideas, maybe, into a silly pretty head, and to make eyes. Oh, I know some of that kidney. I have met 'em in town, and at Portsmouth, too, and Bath, with their airs and graces and perfumes, and their canes and insolence, and their pretensions, and—their manners—and——"

"'Tis a pity, indeed, that there are not others who have their manners," broke in Barbara, with haughty displeasure, "for I cannot fancy Sir Piers so rude and

gross of speech. Mr. Faversham, you are unmannerly, and I will beg you to leave this conversation. If living in the country brings such lack of courtesy, you should pray to live in town, for you need it badly."

And with this piece of severity was the topic discharged for the time. Barbara would hear no more, and Gilbert Faversham was bitterly conscious of his own folly, and was angry simultaneously with himself and the man who had drifted from London to this remote spot to destroy his dawning happiness. Yet Sir Piers, it seemed, did not reciprocate the distaste. He had more than once passed remarks of a pleasant nature upon young Faversham, as Miss Garraway remembered in the heat of her honest indignation.

"He is a fine, up-standing young man," he had said, gazing at him through the quizzing glass. "I think, Miss Barbara, you were good enough to give me his name once, but I confess I have forgotten. Faversham? Ah, of course, Faversham; I will remember." After which, he added that such men were of great use in a time of national warfare.

"He is a soldier," cried Barbara, not ill pleased to sound the praise of her old friend. "He has served in the yeomanry at Christchurch."

"Excellent! Admirable!" said the beau, nodding; "a very proper youth informed by the right spirit. But the yeomanry! He should be with the army. I must see if something cannot be done toward securing him that privilege, since your mother"—he looked full at Barbara for a moment—"takes such an interest in him."

It was perhaps fortunate that Mr. Gilbert Faversham did not hear Sir Piers's promise of patronage, and as Barbara, for some reasons she did not attempt to analyze, did not carry the offer to him, it never reached the young man's ears. The Squire, however, heard of it, as Sir Piers repeated it in his presence when the talk had ranged to Faversham.

"A young man of excellent quality," he declared, "and sure to rise, should he get the opportunity. I will make it my business to see that he does get it. I will see that he gets a commission."

At which Squire Garraway looked up, and grinned, a joke lumbering vaguely in his rude mind. "Where'll you get that?" says he. "You can't buy 'em from Mrs. Clarke any more," and laughed heartily.

"Sir," answered Sir Piers to this lout, "my friends do not sell me, they give me. My recommendation is sufficient, and Mr. Faversham convinces me that my recommendation will be justified."

The Squire grunted, but the sharpness and assurance of the tone had had its effect on him, and he made no reply. Certainly this man was a monstrously civil fellow, and seemed influential. His Lucy's arguments and attitude had already begun to move his sluggish mind. It will be clear how these evidences of Sir Piers's friendly disposition toward Faversham prepared Barbara for annoyance with the latter's surly views about the baronet. The elder man appeared in a gracious and kindly light, willing to recognize merit when he found it, and anxious to put himself about to help a young man to a career; whereas the other showed as ill-natured and irritable as

a cur that would snarl at any stranger. Insensibly, the picture of Gilbert Faversham which Barbara carried in her mind's eye began to change—a process which was stimulated by Sir Piers's remarks, although she was not conscious of it. The consideration of the visitor was not confined to Faversham and his future. He showed an inclination to take the whole Garraway family under his wing. He discoursed with the Squire on cockfighting, and told of mains he had witnessed in the Prince's company, recommending to him a peculiar breed of bird, which he promised he would send down to Moyden when he reached town. This was the turning point in his relations with the Squire, who was afterward heard to give his opinion to young Faversham that Blakiston "was a main jackdaw for clothes, but not a bad cully at bottom." It was Miss Barbara who heard this high praise, and it pleased her greatly, for it was only additional testimony to Sir Piers's charm, which she and her mother had always felt. That her papa should have succumbed was a triumph indeed.

Mrs. Garraway was won, if she had wanted more winning, by the condescension of the great man in drinking tea in her boudoir, and in tasting and approving of her preserves and cordials. He would criticise, but it was with the air of an expert, and he would leave you with the impression that his very criticism expressed distinction. Your things were worth criticism, in fact, and were not merely, so to speak, bowed civilly into oblivion. He sipped of many a glass, to the sacrifice of his palate; for he was no lover of home-made liquors, and not elderberry wine, nor mead, nor rough cider and rougher perry

had charms for him. On the other hand, the preserved plums were admirable, and he knew it, but unhappily had no tooth for sweets. As he sat in the stillroom, to which he had pressed for an invitation, he felt that he was of a truth a martyr to an idea. But what was the idea? Sir Piers surveyed it in his mind with deliberation and in the coldest of blood. He could look any idea in the face, and it would not shock or shame him. Yet now, as he surveyed it so coolly, it retreated, withdrew into something vague, and he was fain to turn back to the immediate present.

"I thank you, madam," he said, in answer to his hostess's persuasions, after the fourth plum, "but I find that a fruit between meals is apt to cloy the stomach. It is wisest to abstain, however alluring the temptation. And if," he continued sweetly, "I might be so bold as to ask you for a small glass of eau-de-vie."

"Faith, yes, Sir Piers. Dear me, how amiss I am in my hospitality," cried the good soul, jumping to her feet, and then on a sudden inspiration stopped. "Why, a glass of rhubarb wine will be better. You have not tasted my rhubarb wine, Sir Piers."

The baronet faintly smiled. "I fear," he said, "after the sweets I shall be unable to do justice to your brew. If I might—another day?"

The eau-de-vie put him in another mood, and having done his duty and thus paid his scot, he turned toward his purpose. But what was his purpose? He forbore to think out the puzzle, and talked of town.

"There is a great likelihood that the town will be more than usual gay this season," said he, with the air

of one dealing out the news of the day. "I heard from Lady Marston this morning. Did you not say that you knew her ladyship?"

"La, Sir Piers," said Mrs. Garraway archly, "what chance have I to know your fashionable folks? 'Twas Lady Garnet I mentioned."

"True, true, I had forgotten," said Sir Piers.

"Well, you would like Lady Marston. She's one of our wits, and was a beauty once."

"'Tis sad to think of 'once,' is't not, Sir Piers?" said the lady, with a sigh.

In his sharp way he saw where her thoughts ran, and answered them. "Maybe some day, madam, we shall be saying that of you," he said gallantly.

"Some day!" she echoed, but smiled quite handsomely.

"Lady Marston is reputed to give some of the best entertainments in the season," he pursued equably; "I hope that some day you will have become acquainted."

"Oh, we're poor humble country cousins," said the lady.

"Madam," said he, "there's no better stock in the country than our landed gentry. I would we could see more of them at Court. 'Tis what the Prince aims at—to fetch new blood into town. It would invigorate us. Lady Marston, too, is of that opinion, and I may say that I have always urged it in high circles. Indeed, this letter of Lady Marston bears very much upon that point. If Mr. Garraway would consent to spend a season in London, and others like him, no doubt but they would be welcomed with open arms."

"He would never consent, Sir Piers; he is wedded to his place, he cannot abear town."

"Yet not so perhaps his daughter and his lady," suggested Sir Piers, smiling.

Mrs. Garraway uttered a little sigh. "I am too old," said she. "I would have dearly liked it years ago; but now my roots are in Moyden."

"'Tis a pity," said Blakiston, "that Miss Barbara's roots should go down so fast and so firm. She is young. There's nothing like travel to open eyes."

"'Twould disturb her, sir," said the mother doubtfully. "She is not always a dutiful child, being wayward."

"She is very charming. The world would think so," persisted Sir Piers.

"The world would do her no good: I fear the world," said Mrs. Garraway soberly. She had coquetted with the thought, but was too well grown in her traditions not to be terrified by the outlook into the circle of rank and fashion. She shook her head. "We are poor country cousins," she repeated, falling back on her first thought, "we have no right in town," she said slowly.

Sir Piers Blakiston finished his eau-de-vie, and rose.

"It is said we shall have a very gay season." He also repeated himself, as he bade his hostess good-by.

"It must be very grand," she said wistfully.

CHAPTER V

BARBARA GOES A-SHOPPING

THE Honorable Harry Miles had enjoyed himself very passably in the Forest. The Squire and he were about together, and had fished, hunted, and shot over a large part of the country. Yet with the turn of the year toward April he began to grow restless, and impatient to reach London and see how affairs went. For one thing, the hunting was over; and for another, he had applied for a post on active service, and desired to know his fate. Matters were in this state when he broke unceremoniously into Sir Piers's room early one morning, with a packet of papers in his hand and an unusual excitement kindling his eye.

"Here's news, Blakiston," said he. "Here's the very devil of news. What d'ye think? The Duke has gone, has given in his resignation. And in the very thick of the war, too!"

Sir Piers leisurely held out an arm to his man to adjust his coat and said with an air of meditation:

"How very inopportune! I had a commission I wanted from him. How very tiresome of him. Horner, my coat sags below the pocket. You will discard this henceforth on our arrival in town. You see, Harry," he said genially to his friend, "I am become bumpkin, and now I look at you, I descry certain signs that you,

too, are descending into that degree. Let my fate be a warning to you, Harry, a warning and an awful example. I wear a coat that sags. Heavens, I thank God I am not visible from Pall Mall."

But Miles was swallowed up in his news, and had no ears for this badinage. He opened his paper eagerly. "It is all here," he said, "and I have letters also. By the way, there is some come for you."

"Give me your paper," said Sir Piers, and inspected the news while his man put the finishing touches on his toilet. "'The Duke of York'" he read, "'resigned the Commandership-in-Chief on the 20th.' Well, my dear Miles, this comes of living in the country that we hear no news for a week. The lady was handsome enough, but impudent, and I never met a more preposterous fellow than His Royal Highness. Still it is unfortunate. I see I must go elsewhere for my commission."

"I have mine," burst in Miles, with a broad smile of contentment. "My papers are come, and, by the Lord, I'm for town to-day, Blakiston. There is preparations in full swing for the expedition to Flanders, and 'tis there I go. I am under orders now."

Sir Piers reflected. "I congratulate you," he said, "and you shall, if you will, carry back a letter for me."

"What!" cried Miles, in surprise, "are you still staying? Have you not finished? What the devil keeps you? I believe after all 'tis the little beauty."

"O wondrous wisdom," said Sir Piers, rubbing his fingers with his handkerchief delicately. "Those sharp eyes and that power of inference, Harry, will serve you

well in Flanders. I envy your troop. They will have a most capable and masterful officer."

His friend laughed without showing any signs of being abashed, and Sir Piers descended to breakfast. He read his letters with a running comment, in an agreeable humor, and paid little heed to what he ate or drank.

"His Royal Highness writes that he is chagrined by the Clarke affair," he said aloud. "Naturally. 'Tis something he would not have been guilty of. He has always kept clean hands, and no woman has made a fool of him."

Miles looked up in astonishment. "Come," he protested, "what of the Fitzherbert?"

"The Prince," said Sir Piers, without raising his eyes from his letter, "made a fool of Mrs. Fitzherbert. I see he complains still that he was not allowed to take part in the war. His royal brother is gone, and he would like to have had the place. What a mistake! What a blunder! Only think! If the Prince had command, there would now be no Buonaparte and no war, and you would be spared Flanders, Harry." He laid aside the letter equably and opened another. "Mrs. Vale (Did you know her, Harry?) is run off with Sir Frederick Vaughan. How the woman (dear soul) will perish of starvation when the thing is forgotten!"

"Starvation!" echoed Miles, without comprehension.

"Yes. Her vanity will starve before a year is out. She lived on feeding it, and has mistaken in a hot fit her vanity for her heart. That she has not, but a very pretty foot and two damnable languishing eyes. Here

is a pretty batch of scandals since we left, as Lady Marston relates them."

"Lady Marston," said Miles. "I would not believe her on oath. She's a hawk, she's a harpy, she's a bird of prey."

"My dear Harry, we're not asked to believe her on oath, only on paper; and as for the lady, she is a very entertaining, handsome woman."

Miles shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," pursued Sir Piers good-naturedly, "as you slight so excellent a woman, I refuse to read you the news which was specially diverting, in particular an item about a friend of yours."

Harry Miles looked with interrogation in his eyes and met the twinkle in the baronet's. "Yes," assented Sir Piers, "myself and no other. London is agreeably divided on my absence, Harry. The one part declares I have been lost in the Isle of Wight, and is in favor of advertising in the local papers. The other holds that I am in pious retirement, inventing a new fashion. Who knows if these be not prophetic?" he said lightly, and for a time was silent, sunk in thought. Indeed, when Miles left him he was still at the table, his gaze fixed upon the patch of landscape which was visible through the window, and a frown upon his face. Was he going to invent a new fashion?

When Harry Miles set off that afternoon for London by chaise to Winchester, thence to run by stages onward, he was sped upon his way by Sir Piers Blakiston, who commended to his care two letters, one of these being addressed to Lady Marston.

"You will pay your respects to the Prince," he commanded, "and he will be glad to see you. Tell him from me that I am securing the new picture for his walls in due course. Also I trust to have the honor to salute him within the next week, unless my business delays me. I am sorry you are going, Harry, but you were always selfish. Good-by," and he lightly dismissed the younger man, and turned his back on the chaise. He walked by Setley toward the woods of Boldre. Sir Piers, as has been indicated, was a man of some emotional force. His temperament was not of that stolid character which he delighted to affect, and he was sometimes under the influence of genuine feeling. He had, as a matter of detail, been somewhat excited when he saw Miles off, excited and preoccupied, although you would never have discovered it from his face or manner. They were witnesses only to profound indifference or cynical levity. Yet Sir Piers had been disturbed since the receipt of his letters in the morning, and it was odd that he could not say whether pleasantly or unpleasantly. He had had a friendly letter from the Prince, in which his absence had been commented upon in terms he could not but take as flattering, and in which amiable fun had been made of his excuses.

"There is no one believes it," said the letter. "Anyway, I remember your promise and hold you to it, and in any case, if you're not back, Blakiston, by Wednesday week, by —— I'll make up a party that will drive over and spoil your hunt for you. Deuce take me if I let you off." Sir Piers drew the letter from his pocket and reread it. He replaced it and stood a moment

on Setley Heath to consider. Before him the common rolled upward toward Ringwood, and Lymington lay under a rise away to his left. The sky was blown clear and blue, and the wind came off the Channel. He could see the dim Solent, and beyond the faint high cliffs of the Island.

"He would be quite capable of coming," he said thoughtfully; "it's a trick he would like. Shall I let him, or shall I write to Lady Marston?"

He resumed his walk, and his mind was still undecided when he came to the margin of Moyden Chase, and saw Barbara advancing toward him.

She came over the stile without perceiving him, and he stood by in the cover of the hedgerow, and watched her. She was clad in a russet gown, very prettily and simply, short of sleeve and high of girdle, and a childish cap, very becoming to her youth and innocence, crowned her head. She picked up the loose skirt at the stile, and stepped over with a neat, swift action which was full of grace. Her body swayed lithely in the air as she leaped to the road, and for the first time saw Sir Piers. She dropped her skirt quickly, and gave him a bow and a blush.

"I am fortunate," he said, with his hat in his hand. "I have only walked three miles to see you."

"To see me!" she echoed in surprise, and some confusion.

"Yes," said Sir Piers, watching her. "I wished to consult you. I have been in perplexity. Indeed, I scarcely got through the night with sleep. I must beg of your assistance."

"I—I will give you any I can," she faltered.

"That is kind of you," he said. "May I be permitted to walk with you?"

"I am going to Lymington," said Barbara doubtfully.

"A dull place, Miss Garraway," said the beau, "but a sweet place, Miss Barbara, transfigured by memories."

"I do not doubt, sir," she said hastily. He walked beside her.

"You do not ask how you can help me," said he.

She did not, for somehow she was afraid. "It is a question of color," he went on deliberately. "I am designing a dress for Lady Marston, and I must match a special blue. It has made me miserable, and I am not used to fail."

He looked at her gravely, with no shadow of a smile on his face, and Barbara, whose first feeling had been one of relief, checked the laugh which was rising in her. After all, it was a compliment that so famous a man and a master of costume should seek her help. She replied demurely:

"I will give you all the assistance a country girl may."

"That is right," he sighed deeply; "I shall feel more confident now. Please do not let us discuss it till we reach Lymington. Let me have a rest for the present."

She examined him carefully and in doubt. Was he serious? Or was he not rather poking fun at her for a poor rustic? She was almost inclined to come to the

latter conclusion; but he went on in his pleasant, rather distant, and authoritative way:

"You may be interested to know, Miss Barbara, that I have undertaken to secure your friend, Mr. Faversham, a commission in due course."

"Oh," she cried eagerly, "do you think you will be able to get him one? How good of you!"

"I said I had *undertaken* it," said Sir Piers, in a tone of gentle rebuke. "When I undertake anything it is done. I have no doubt Mr. Faversham would be better serving his country than kicking his heels in a village."

"I kick my heels in a village," she reminded him demurely, "and at present you are doing the same."

For answer he shot her a glance which was at once quizzical, indulgent, and admiring. "Behold," he said, throwing up his hands in emphasis or introduction, "Behold two mutually interdependent propositions!"

Barbara's color drew into her cheeks, although she knew not why. His answer had been formidable, but not too intelligible to her. Yet she figuratively shrank from her companion, and next moment, with her native inconsistency, found herself wanting to provoke him.

"Where is Captain Miles?" she asked. Sir Piers explained that his friend had returned to London. "What!" she cried, with her innocent eyes on him, "and leaves you here! Faith, sir, you will be very solitary."

Again Sir Piers's gaze sought her face, not with that distance which his courteous tone maintained; and once again she blushed, and was annoyed to think she did so.

"Maybe," he returned, "but I have work to do; and as you know, Miss Barbara, there's no room for boredom where there's work."

Barbara took a desperate plunge, which she repented ere her words were out of her mouth. "What is your work?" she blurted forth.

Sir Piers did not seem surprised; his expression remained urbane and quiet; but still once more his eyes went to hers and lingered there with meaning.

"It is work," said he, "that is pleasant enough, yet may prove fruitless."

This was enigmatic, but she did not press him further, being overwhelmed by the insistency of his gaze. It seemed to her that they had drawn into intimacy during the last ten minutes, and she was afraid of it. Barriers were going down between them one after another, and she was beginning to feel helpless. She struggled to throw them up again. She stopped and faced him boldly, looking very handsome with her renewed color.

"You had best go back, sir," she said tremulously, but with resolution. "I want no escort to Lymington. I would rather be alone."

"My dear Miss Barbara," said he, smiling and showing no surprise, "you are heartless. I was congratulating myself on your promise, and now"——

"Oh, I know nothing of dress," she declared impatiently, "I am a country ignoramus."

"Tut, tut, child," he said with decision, and frowned at her. "Very well," he went on in another voice, very polite, as if he had determined what to do. "I would not thrust my company on you, child. Go in peace,

and as I also am bound thither, I hope you will permit me also to go in peace." With this he bowed and crossed the road, proceeding along the footpath parallel to her.

Barbara, after a little hesitation, went on her way, and walked in ostentatious disregard of him. At first she was extremely uncomfortable at the thought that she had been rude. What had he done to be sent about his business so unceremoniously? And he the great Sir Piers Blakiston, to whom her mother was so respectful! She was almost agitated at the reflection that the man who was familiar with princesses and duchesses, and who was supposed to control fashion, had been used impertinently by an obscure country girl. His "child," and his frown, and his indifferent acceptance of the position, showed how trivial he regarded it, and how little he thought of her. And here Barbara lost her agitation, for it was abominable that he should think so little of her. His eyes had told another tale. What did he mean by acting lies? She glanced across at him, where he walked with his slow, deliberate stride, and felt angry with him.

"I do not care if he is Sir Piers Blakiston," she told herself in her irritation. "He is just a man like any of them, and not so handsome as Gilbert Faversham. He is full of airs and affectations. If I were a man I would think shame to talk so much of clothes. He is a popinjay."

But this vein of reflection led nowhere, and, of a sudden, the humor of the situation breaking on her, she burst into melodious laughter.

"Sir Piers!" she cried, "Sir Piers!" but he walked on as if he did not hear. "Sir Piers!" she called again, and running across the road touched him on the arm. "Sir Piers, we cannot look so foolish. We must walk together."

Sir Piers's face was very grave. "My dear Miss Barbara," he said, "I do not plead guilty to be looking foolish, but I am glad to walk together."

That set them on excellent terms with one another, and he beguiled the rest of the way with stories of the Court and Society, of which, to say the truth, she never tired. She panted for London and its gayeties, as the hart after the water brooks.

"I shall die without seeing them," she complained, like a child that is disappointed.

Sir Piers said nothing except "You must not die," very tenderly, and on this occasion she was not afraid. The barriers were all down, and she had got accustomed to the proximity and—the danger.

It was after four o'clock when they reached Lymington, and Barbara proceeded forthwith to her shopping. Sir Piers insisted upon accompanying her, and entered the shops, criticised the wares, and helped her to select with the most convincing interest. He was accustomed to very different shops from those in little Lymington, yet he did not betray the fact by any word or sign. Barbara was conscious of this, and was grateful to him for stooping to the level of her world without condescension. Indeed, he appeared to enjoy the purchasing, and took an infinite deal of trouble over stuffs, and colors, and ribbons, impressing the draper with his knowledge

as well as by his appearance. Barbara could not prevent a flutter at her heart at being so attended, and at drawing thereby all the looks of the town. She looked up at him as they went down the High Street, and was proud of his air of distinction and dignity. He was handsome enough, moreover, and it was delirious to feel that the favorite of princes was carrying her reticule and hanging on her words. She was stimulated by the emotions awakened in her, and displayed a greater gayety and vivacity than ever before. She glowed with her spirits, and, on his part, Sir Piers was struck afresh with admiration of her beauty. Barbara was emboldened in her talk; she played with fire because she felt a positive attraction for risks. The man puzzled her, and she would fain have forced him to discover himself. What did he there at Brockenhurst, so far from his proper haunts? She had asked him pertly what his business was, and had received a look. She knew he admired her, for his eyes told her so; but he was deliberate, he was cool, he was even a little supercilious and patronizing, and he would not be that if he really cared for her with any passion. At one moment she dismissed the idea that he could have fixed his fancy on "a mere unfashionable girl in the heart of the outlands," but the next moment she thrilled with the possibility of that triumph. He exercised upon her a fascination; he was of another world, and amazingly elegant. She admired him with all her heart as he stood so deliberate and superior by her side, taking charge of her affairs, commanding the shopman with a gesture, a veritable lord among his fellow men.

In the haberdasher's Barbara bought her ribbons, submitting humbly to Sir Piers's judgment.

"That shade will answer to the flesh tints," said he, scrutinizing the ribbon and then her face. "You have a delicate hue that mingles with the warmer colors of the flesh—I have not yet put a name to it. It is elusive, but I shall catch it soon. Come, my man, a little less red than these. We are not dressing Polly or Molly."

He chose the colors, and Barbara thanked him. A sense of the humorous, which she had by nature, tickled her greatly, and she could have laughed aloud, yet in all friendliness. Instead she smiled at him.

"And now, sir, that you have been so good as to give me the benefit of your taste," she said prettily, "I must redeem my promise and give you mine."

It was roguish, and Sir Piers had not looked for the thrust. Yet it would have been easy to accept it with smiling indifference, for they were on excellent terms by this time. But Sir Piers was serious.

"About my color?" he said.. "You are right, and it is very kind of you to remember. I should have valued your assistance. But I have solved the problem in the meantime. Shopman," he said, calling to the haberdasher with his soft peremptoriness, "fetch you the silks. I wish you to match me this lady's eyes."

A flood of color spread in Barbara's face. "What do you mean?" she stammered.

Sir Piers was grave. "It came to me as I stood here, a little back," he said. "There is the blue I wish, the precise shade, the exact tone. I've never seen it else-

where save in the pools of your eyes, my child, and in heaven." He spoke with tender warmth and in a lower voice, yet still slow and respectful. Barbara was silent; the shopman spread out his roll, but at the first glance Sir Piers made a gesture of disgust.

"No, my good man, no. Take them away," and to Barbara under his breath, "I will manage it in Bond Street—there, heaven, and your eyes. I will get it if I have to send to Lyons for it, and" he paused as if considering—"and then I doubt if Lady Marston shall wear it. No; she is too manifest: she is of too savage a warmth, not of the right imperial coolness of nature. It wants one that will strike a mean, midway between hot and cold, yea and nay, provocation and indifference. Maybe I shall find her, Miss Barbara, maybe I shall put my hands on her in time."

This was, of course, very elaborate, but Barbara had recovered, and laughed airily, shooting him a reply.

"I have no doubt, sir, you will find anything you wish in town. It is a mightily complacent place, it seems."

She was out of the shop by now, and they had come into the street. The sun was setting beyond the wooded hills into the western seas, and Barbara heard the church bells ring out. It was later than she had thought, for the time had gone very pleasantly. They began to walk downward into the levels of the Boldre road, Sir Piers still carrying the reticule and a small parcel which he had picked up in one of the shops. She rebuked him for it, and endeavored to gain possession of one of the articles; but Sir Piers defended his burdens, and with a gentle

exchange of raillery they passed on their way. Behind them the sun had sunk in a belt of blazing color, and large masses of cloud now swarmed from the south upon the coast, as if they had been the couriers of an invading army. Sir Piers looked back at the increasing darkness, and remarked on it. "There is a storm coming up," he said.

But Barbara, a child of the coast, gave a little cry of dismay. "'Twill be on us soon," she said. "There was never that blackness in the sky but rain fell, and see how fast it marches."

They quickened their steps, but she was right. They had covered scarcely a quarter of a mile more when the storm reached them, fell upon them with fury, and they were involved in the darkness as of night. For a little longer distance they continued, both running now without regard to dignity or appearance, but Sir Piers stopped short.

"We cannot run out of it," he said through the rattle of the rain upon the road. "We must reach shelter," and he indicated a building that stood in the field on his left. Barbara made no answer, but only looked at him helplessly and with a pitiful expression. The rain had drenched her pretty frock. He took her arm gently, and led her into the meadow, whence they made their way as rapidly as possible into the building. It was a large, low-roofed barn, vacant within except for a pile of straw in one corner and a dozen sacks of wheat, dimly visible in the twilight. Upon these they seated themselves and awaited somewhat dismally the passing of the storm. The rain clattered upon the tiles overhead,

raising an unceasing and terrifying roar; darkness grew within the barn, and even the glimmer of gray which marked the door and that lighter patch which was witness to a window faded before the eyes very sensibly. The whole face of nature seemed to have been plunged at a stroke in a deluge and night. Barbara listened to the flail of the rain very miserably, for she was conscious of her wet clothes, and a little alarmed by the turn the adventure had taken. As for Sir Piers, he was for some time silent, his figure visible to her, as still and statuesque in the gloom. Presently he got to his feet and went to the door to look out.

"There is no sign of a break yet," he said in an even voice, when he had groped his way back. "I am sorry your adventure should have ended so ill. Are you very wet, child?" and she felt his hand upon her arm, as though it had been her mother that inquired solicitously after her.

"I think I am soaked," she said, with a little plaintive gasp. Sir Piers's hand had sought hers.

"Are you very unhappy, child?" he said softly.

"Yes. I don't know—I think so," she said, with a sob, and wrested her fingers away. But he followed them and caught them once more, imprisoning them in a strong and implacable grasp. He put out his other arm and laid the tips of his fingers on her bosom. It was wet. She sobbed again. Mud and rain and a feeling of helplessness had broken her down. All the weak elements of her sex were uppermost.

"Poor child, my poor child!" she heard him repeating in a soothing voice, and his soft hand patted her

gently, and "poor child!" again, and then very low and musical, "Barbara—sweetheart."

The rain ceased on the roof with startling suddenness. The stillness by contrast seemed to be the louder noise. It had the effect of thunder on the nerves, and the girl started up. Sir Piers, too, rose and walked forward to the door; a dripping sound now filled the barn, and the air without had lightened. Dusk hung heavily under the eaves of the building, but the light was still strong enough to make out things. At the door Sir Piers came face to face with Gilbert Faversham. The recognition was mutual on the instant, and there was a small cry behind the baronet. Barbara had followed him, and had seen Faversham. Had he seen her? When Sir Piers turned about she had disappeared.

"I have taken shelter from the rain, Mr. Faversham," said he. "I suppose you are come to do the same."

The young man made no reply, but the Squire's voice suddenly rang out from behind.

"Damme, Sir Piers, ye're a cool hand! Gad, you are! I heard a gal's voice, so I did. You took shelter, did you? Prick me silly, I ha' done the same myself in old days," and his rude laughter cackled to the sky.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE BARN

Sir Piers still stood in the doorway without movement, and facing him was young Faversham.

"I think, Mr. Garraway," he said mildly, "that even in Hampshire a man may keep a secret."

"Let 'un keep it," said the Squire cheerfully; but he had fortified himself against the rain with spirits at the last inn, and was in a merry mood. "Let 'un keep it, but you must pay toll of us country folk, Sir Piers. Bring forth the girl, and I swear I will pass judgment on her. Come, Gilbert man, fetch her forth, hey?" and he cracked his whip.

He was still seated on his horse, for he had ridden with Faversham from a meet, and the steam rose alike from his damp clothes and the animal's flanks.

"Go fetch her, Gilbert, I tell you," he pursued, "or, damme, must I get off and do it myself? I see ye've been poaching on our Hampshire beauties, Sir Piers. Fie, man, fie! At him, Gilbert."

Faversham stood where he was, and Sir Piers answered. If he were nettled by this tone, or embarrassed by the situation, it did not appear in his words or voice.

"I entreat you, sir, to spare my blushes," he said. "I admit your Hampshire beauties. 'Tis a country well celebrated for its fair maidens. But indeed, I am

no poacher, I give you my word, and if I were, why, should I be likely to own it? Come, Mr. Garraway, which way go you? and you, sir?" to Faversham. "I will give myself the pleasure to accompany you."

Faversham turned quickly from him. "Let him be, Squire," he said, with singular passion. "We are but country bumpkins, and may not intermeddle with a fine London gentleman."

Even on the muddled Squire his accents fell with a sense of surprise.

"Hulloa, whoa, whoa!" said he, pulling together his wits. "Did you say he wouldn't be driven by us? Damme, Gilbert, I care not whether he be Londoner or countryman. Let 'un fetch her out, and we'll spy her. I wager five guineas to two, lad, that she's either Peg Martin or that girl of Vincent's."

Having regained his hilarity, the Squire pushed forward his beast to the open door, and stood looking into the darkness over Sir Piers's head.

"Come, come, Squire, let the jest end," said the baronet, with a little touch of tartness in his tone.

"Squire, come away," said young Faversham hoarsely, and clutched at his reins.

"Let go, young Beelzebub, let go, I say," said the tipsy Squire, and rapped his heavy crop on the young man's knuckles. "Let's see the sort o' taste Londoners have; let's see what petticoats they admire. Oh! he is a dog, Gilbert, is Sir Piers here. Who'd ha' thought it of his shy, sleek face? He's an old billy goat, he is," and he chuckled without restraint.

Sir Piers's features were impassive, but into his face

crept a darker color, as if he were strongly moved behind his mask. As the horse was urged forward, even into the entrance of the barn, and seemed about to cross the threshold, he put up an arm swiftly and threw it back. The creature staggered and swayed.

"Gad's life! leave go, sir," shouted the Squire, frowning. "Would you keep me out of my own barn, hey?"

"I care not whose barn it is," said Sir Piers, in his stern and peremptory voice, "no one shall enter here against my will," and he thrust the horse farther back as he spoke.

The Squire was so taken aback that for a moment he did nothing, but gaped and stuttered; then, uttering an oath, he lifted his whip high above his head. It descended wildly twice; the first time it was arrested by the lintel of the doorway, and the second time it struck the empty air. Next moment it was torn from his hand so sharply as almost to pull him from the saddle. The enraged Squire recovered his balance with difficulty, to find Sir Piers still cool and unmoved to outward seeming, his face and figure fast melting into the closing night, and in one hand the whip. He stood there, obscure, merging in the gloom, yet with something sinister in that aspect of him, as if he were a menace, a menace that cared for nothing and would stay at nothing. But ere the Squire could sufficiently come to his senses to take any further action, Faversham had seized his bridle, and pulled the horse round.

"You must come away," he urged him impetuously; "time enough to see to this afterward."

Remonstrating and swearing, Squire Garraway was moved almost by force, and Sir Piers watched the two disappear into the darkness. Then he turned about and called softly:

"Barbara—Barbara!"

His voice rang musically through the barn, echoing from the rafters, for his voice was one of his finest properties, and he had cultivated it to perfection. He heard a sob somewhere in the darkness, and called again. Presently she answered, and he guided himself to her. She was taken into his arms, where she lay for a moment quiet, but weeping softly, and then she struggled from him.

"You are cruel! Ah, how cruel you are!" she said vehemently.

"My sweet child," he said, "there is no wonder you are so shaken. 'Twas an unhappy chance. Yet why did you fly, Barbara? There was no need to fly. 'Twas your flight made the difficulty and the suspicion."

"I—I know not why," she faltered. "It was dark, and—" Indeed she was hardly aware of the reason of her act, which had come in part from her mental disorganization, in part from a vague feeling of guilt, and in part also from the sudden appearance of Gilbert Faversham. As for Sir Piers, although he gently made her responsible for the situation, he was not at all ill-pleased with it. Her blunder had given them a secret in common; for he was now no longer in any doubt what he wanted, and at what he should aim. The Prince must be prevented from the visitation he threatened, for Sir Piers's plans had undergone a wonderful change,

and he wished for no interference. To this end he must go to town by Wednesday, but that was yet some days distant. He calculated that he had plenty of time to carry matters as far as he desired for the present. He was a man of very genuine emotions, yet he had learned patience, and was in no haste. The satisfaction he had anticipated for himself, when he had first formed his scheme, was quite different from the pleasure which the present position gave him. He took her hands in his, and they were cold; she shivered.

"I fear you have taken a cold, child," he said tenderly, and as he spoke a light flashed out of the blackness upon them, throwing both of the figures into relief. Sir Piers turned with a swift movement, and over the lantern caught sight of a dim face.

"Ah!" he said slowly, "so I guessed. I am much indebted to you, Mr. Faversham, for assisting me to get rid of a very troublesome person."

Faversham uttered an oath, and setting the lantern on the sill of the window, strode forward.

"Gilbert!" cried Barbara, in terror.

Sir Piers looked from one to the other, as if he were the spectator of a little drama in which he was not himself involved. His glance of interrogation seemed to wonder what each of the others would do, but to wonder only mildly.

"I have got your father home," said Faversham, speaking tensely to the girl.

"I trust you got him to bed," murmured Sir Piers politely.

The young man turned on him, swollen with anger

and jealousy. "There is something between us that must be settled, sir," he said passionately.

"Upon my soul," observed Sir Piers, eyeing him, "it looks as if there was or would be. Will you permit me to give this lady my attention, and I will then be able to give you my undivided ears?"

"You shall not go with her. You shall not touch her," broke out Faversham fiercely. "Your company is degradation; your touch is a taint."

"As you have observed," said Sir Piers dryly, "it looks as if there would be something between us to settle shortly."

"I make no pretense, sir," thundered the younger man, "to imitate your effrontery or your fine London manners."

"The question rather is," put in Sir Piers coolly, "do you make a pretense of imitating any manners?"

"What good are you here for?" said Faversham, lashing his fury higher. "What do you here, skulking about the villages? I know something of your history, sir, and this I say to you, that you shall not go unscathed. I find you here with this lady."

"I really wish you had not, Mr. Faversham," said Sir Piers frankly.

"Bah! you can only reply with insolence. But we shall have done with talk and get to deeds directly."

"I do hope we shall have done with talk," said Sir Piers amiably, "for I am afraid it is wearying Miss Garraway dreadfully. I say nothing of myself."

"I recognized who your companion was," pursued Faversham, without heeding this, "and as soon as I

could manage it, I got away and came back. I came back, Barbara, because——"

"I think we can discuss this better in Miss Garraway's absence," said Sir Piers, in a sharper tone.

"No," said the young man, and there was less anger and more dignity in his voice now, "no, there is this that must be said before her. Barbara, I came back because it was necessary that I should ask you how you stood to this man. Before I can go further, before I can take any step, it is necessary I should know how he stands to you. I ask you, Barbara, what is there between you of any kind?"

His voice was clear but uncertain, wavering under the emotions which stirred him. Barbara cast him a frightened glance.

"There is nothing," she said, in a low voice.

"Then I am justified—then I am resolved," he said, but there was still that trouble in his voice and in his face.

Sir Piers had watched Barbara carefully while the question was being put, and she had avoided meeting his eye when she answered. Now he spoke in the same polished, even voice.

"Perhaps now Mr. Faversham will be good enough to listen to me, and later to explain the grounds of this amazing intrusion. After which, no doubt, we shall all be able to get home with the aid of that lantern which, I am bound to say, I at first had hoped that Mr. Faversham had brought on purpose."

Barbara stood with averted head, more than a little pale, and the misery hung in Faversham's eyes.

"Go on," he said harshly. "I will hear you first, and then——"

"And then, sir," broke in Sir Piers, in his sterner note of authority, "I hope you will have the manners to apologize for insulting and distressing a lady. What is it that you have done, I ask you? Why, without questions asked, and with no personal right of your own to interfere, you have provoked a most violent and intemperate scene. Miss Garraway, who has been to Lymington, and whom I had the good fortune to encounter, takes shelter from a most desperate storm in her father's own barn.—I trust," and he turned toward the girl, "I trust I was able to be of some slight assistance in the emergency.—Upon the top of that comes me up two gentlemen, who have no doubt ridden far, and have, therefore, their excuses for their condition. Miss Garraway, alarmed by the sound of their approach, seeks refuge again in the friendly barn, and thereby, by an odd and unhappy circuit of events, is developed a situation for perplexity, for annoyance, even for ridicule, if you will, but not, by God! sir, a situation for insult and suspicion, and one rather, I should have said, for sympathy and respect."

Faversham stared at him, breathing deeply still with excitement, but with some bewilderment. Sir Piers made an inimitable gesture with his hands as of one who deprecated what he must now say, and proceeded in a slow voice of authority.

"May I ask you, Mr. Faversham," said he, "to let your thoughts dwell a moment on the scene, with its awkwardness and its pain. The Squire's condition, ob-

vious and glaring, his rough invitation, the threat of force, the impossibility of exposing a lady to the juxtaposition of his own ribaldry—these facts should raise in any generous heart a chivalrous tenderness for the feelings of even a stranger, much more of one who has been familiar to you for years. Sir! this attitude of yours becomes you ill. You are unjust and unkind, and I know no two greater offenses against the moral code."

The rebuke, uttered with such dignity, delivered almost, as it were, from a bench of judgment, sent the blood into Faversham's face. It stung like a whiplash, and there is no doubt that had Sir Piers read the younger man's character more clearly, he would have stopped short of the last reprimand. That sensitiveness flew to arms, and from embarrassed doubt, which had characterized his feelings at the outset of the baronet's speech, Faversham passed at a stroke into indignant pride and anger. Sir Piers had aimed at peace; he had provoked war, and yet never had Barbara admired his qualities so greatly as now. Beside him Gilbert Faversham appeared as a barking dog beside the lion, as something in sad contrast with his cold dignity.

"Sir, you shall not lecture me," declared the young man vehemently. "That you should talk of a moral code—you, whose repute is well known, aye, even in this outlandish spot, where you are in exile for reasons of your own! You talk speciously, and there is your strength, I suppose, with unhappy women, who are so foolish as to believe what seems, and what they would like to believe."

"Sir," interrupted Sir Piers sternly, "I forbid you

to speak further. You gabble like a plowboy. You shall speak no more in the presence of this lady."

"Nay, I will say nothing in Miss Garraway's presence," said Faversham furiously, "but I shall have much to say alone."

The baronet raised his hand, as if waving aside the threat. "And now, if you will be so good, your lantern to light this lady home," he said curtly, and turned to her. "Miss Barbara, pray accept my apologies for having been in a manner responsible for detaining you here so long. 'Tis high time you were got out of your damp clothes. Pray allow me to assist you."

Barbara's face was full of angry color now, and as she went forward in obedience to Sir Piers's request, she moved with ostentatious spirit, and shot a furious and scornful shaft at the unhappy Faversham. But he stood by, the frown of passion fading from his face, his eyes cast down, and his heart absorbed in fear and misery. He did not see the glance, he would not meet her eyes; for indeed he would not have dared to throw a look at her, and shame her and read her shame. He little knew how she went by glowing with indignation at his usage of her, and honest innocence afire in her mantled cheeks. And so they went, and he saw them pass out of the barn, Sir Piers with the enemy's lantern in his hand, while the other was at the service of the girl. Somehow the affair had not ended as he had anticipated. He it was who seemed to be the guilty one, and the victor it was who passed from him, leaving him overcome with various racking emotions.

Yet the affair had not ended, for Sir Piers was met

in the lanes half an hour later by a tall, cool, implacable young man, who had waited for him.

"Well, sir," said the baronet, coming to a pause, as the other's horse was deliberately drawn across the way, "Well, sir, is there to be another repetition of bad manners?"

"You still give me a lesson in 'em," said the young man, dropping quickly to the ground.

"This portends, as I understand, a duel, Mr. Faversham," said Sir Piers quietly.

"You have a quick intelligence if you have bad morals," observed Faversham mockingly.

Sir Piers considered him, although it was now quite dark, and he could make out nothing but the outlines of his adversary. Still it was rather with a mental eye that he summed him up. "Mr. Faversham," he said at length, "can you use a pistol?"

"What is that to do with you, sir?" demanded Gilbert haughtily.

"Merely this, sir," said Sir Piers coolly, "that I wish to find myself under no charge of murder, and to meet you, my dear sir, would be nothing short of that."

"Ah!" says Gilbert Faversham, with a sneer, "I see you are thinking of a very theatrical performance. Then, as now, you were a mere thing of stage postures."

"Mr. Faversham," said the baronet, "I have caned young men for less than that."

"Well, you shall try your pistol on me," said he hotly.

"I do not use my pistol," said Sir Piers placidly, "on these occasions. As I have said, it is my cane I

employ. If you will be good enough to stand aside, I will finish my walk."

"You shall not budge one foot," declared Faversham, "until you answer my challenge."

"If you have no shame, and would fetch an innocent lady's name into bad odor, why, my good sir, I will be no party to the infamy," replied Sir Piers impatiently. "Stand aside."

"No," said Faversham, "her name will not appear. You and I quarrel, and you can invent any damned pretext you will. I will slap your face to-morrow, if you will."

"Well," said Sir Piers wearily, "if we are to wait until to-morrow to quarrel, let us part quietly now," and once more he made a movement to pass the other. The horse stood with his hind quarters in the ditch on one side, and the stalwart Faversham blocked the path upon the other. With a sudden turn of his wrist, Sir Piers dexterously twisted the horse about and moved through the gap imperturbably. For an instant Faversham wavered in his intention, and then, restraining himself, called out in tones of derision:

"'Tis settled, then, we shall arrange this to-morrow."

"Oh, I very much fear that I shall be bothered with you to-morrow," said Sir Piers's voice, but Sir Piers's head did not turn, and his footsteps marched serenely into the night.

CHAPTER VII

"WHEN LUBIN IS AWAY"

BARBARA had passed a night of misery and unrest. That her daughter arrived home late had not concerned Mrs. Garraway so much as that she had been wet to the skin. She fussed over her in her autocratic, tender way, remonstrating on her folly and dictating sundry remedies or restoratives. Barbara must drink a cup of posset in bed, and to bed she was sent forthwith, not as a punishment (for, to do Mrs. Garraway justice, she did not hold her daughter responsible for the storm), but as a precaution against chills and aches. So Barbara lay long abed, and found it difficult to sleep. The fire burned briskly on the hearth at the foot of her chamber, and the shadows leaped on the ceiling and the walls whenever her eyes were opened. Her mind was divided among half a dozen different and antagonistic thoughts. She had passed through more emotions that afternoon than she remembered in all her life, and some had been strange, and—she did not know whether they had been pleasant or dreadful. Her agitation had been attributed by her mother to fear of the storm, and no word had been said of Sir Piers. Barbara had gone forth alone, and had come back unaccompanied. She was scolded for delaying so long in Lymington as to be caught in the rain; and that was all. The picture of her father

tipsily battering at the doors, so to speak, to fetch forth his daughter to shame, made her palpitate with feeling and cover her face in self-abasement. Yet it was impossible to withhold from Sir Piers a sense of gratitude and admiration for his defense of her, and she was still angry with Faversham for embarrassing her so. With all this there entered the fear of what would happen between the two men. It must be confessed that mingling with her terror was a curious feeling of expectation, even of satisfaction, at the thought of that duel which she dreaded. The idea held her with fascination, confusing all her original ideas and emotions. She wondered what had happened. Had Sir Piers met Faversham again? Had they quarreled? Was it possible that they had fought? The thought aroused her thoroughly, and her excited nerves gave way. She had a sudden panic, which drew her swiftly out of bed and into her clothes. Then, realizing the absurdity of her actions, she stopped herself, and once more threw herself upon her couch and wept abundant tears. Gilbert was dead! Sir Piers was dead! They had fought about her honor! She sat up. Well, it was but justice if Gilbert were dead, who had wronged her so. What right had he to interfere in her affairs? As the sharpness of the picture she had invoked faded in her imagination, her anger broke out anew against Faversham. It was in the early hours of the morning that she fell asleep at last, fell into the profound, untroubled slumber that comes to the succor of those who are exhausted in body and spirit. She slept, her closed and innocent eyes to the jasmined window, through which, long ere

she woke, the young spring sun flung checkers on her face.

The post brought a letter to Sir Piers which changed the current of his thoughts, and, giving Horner his orders, he commanded the innkeeper to get ready a chaise. The Prince, it seemed, from Lady Marston's communication, had, for lack of a better amusement, resolved to pay his threatened visit to the exile, and might start any day the whim seized him. "He has been greatly chagrined as to the Duke of York's scandal," wrote Lady Marston, "and he longs for distraction, even though that should precipitate a scandal for himself."

"There shall be no scandal here in which His Royal Highness participates," said Sir Piers to himself grimly, and straightway ordered his chaise to run to Winchester. Yet when he was set in it with his baggage and the faithful Horner, it was not upon the Winchester road that he drove, but upon the Southampton. He had met in hostilities with the Squire, and he could not guess how much had come out, or if the girl had turned hysteric, as she might well have done; he did not even know if the impetuous young countryman would hold his tongue. Yet he was resolved to make a call at Moyden before leaving; and so he dropped out of the chaise before the gates of the manor house about eleven of a fine spring day.

He found Mrs. Garraway in the thick of her housewifery, and full at the same time of hospitality. She begged he would stay and dine with them, and when he declined, was disposed to throw aside her work and enjoy

one of their conversations on Society and Fashion. But Sir Piers politely cut her short. He was bound for town, and his carriage was at the gates. He had called to make his adieus, and to return thanks for many hospitalities. Whereupon the good lady flew into a state of emotion, and sent messengers for her husband and her daughter to bid the visitor farewell.

"Sir Piers is leaving us," she told Barbara, who entered, very quiet and very handsome, in response to her summons. "He is going back to town, that town which has spared him so long."

"Which I have spared, madam," he said, smiling, and looked at Barbara. She was a little pale, and showed under the surface of her manner a tremulous discomposure. Her glance met his with a question, which was almost a fear.

"Sir Piers, are you going—do you go to London at once?" she asked quickly.

"Letters, my dear Miss Barbara, carry me away forthwith," he replied. "My chaise is at the door."

"But this is not the road to town," she said anxiously. "Why go you this way?"

Sir Piers bowed toward her mother. "Would you have me such an ingrate?" he asked lightly, but he was still regarding her with significant eyes.

Barbara displayed some agitation, but at that moment the Squire entered. Sir Piers was fully prepared for an uncouth scene, and had his course of action ready. It was not likely that Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone would shrink from meeting such a rustic lout, or indeed consider him at all. But, to his astonishment, the Squire

was very friendly, more so than on previous occasions, and went so far as to accompany him to the gate.

"Well, Sir Piers," said he, in his rough accent, and grinning at the Londoner, "you're a cool hand, so you are. Damn me, but I haven't seen a cooler, so, not since I was a lad myself. Whom had you got there, eh? Gad! you was near having me off that horse. I had only a noggin or so of brandy this side of Lyndhurst, and I keep my legs anything short of a bottle. But 'twas the whip did it. Ye've more strength in you than seems, man. Ah! I should ha' liked to see whom ye'd got there."

"These secrets of honor, Squire," said Sir Piers lightly, "must not be betrayed. They would cry to Heaven for vengeance."

"Let 'em cry," said the Squire, laughing. "Ah! but I was near fetching you a clout o' the head—that's so. Indeed I would but for young Gilbert, who had more sense in his head, having only taken a pint of Burgundy." He bade his visitor farewell in great good humor, and Sir Piers mounted. He had said good-by to Barbara in her mother's presence, but he lingered. Then, reluctantly, he ordered the postilion to drive on. As he did so he heard his name called out, and, looking back, saw the girl in the gateway. He descended and went to her. She was full of agitation, and began at once.

"Sir Piers, you are not—you do not go—what are you going to do?" she cried, in distress. "You must not."

He understood, and smiled. "I am driving to Lon-

don, child," he said. "Never fear. I am meeting no one. Indeed, I am flying from a very hot opponent, who seeks my blood. D'ye think you could care for such a coward, Barbara?" he asked.

"You are flying," she said, and saw the easy smile on his face. "Ah! you are full of jest and satire." Her demeanor underwent a subtle change, and she involuntarily moved away a step. She had stolen out to catch him in her fears, and now that these were gone, she was afraid for herself. "You are going?" she said weakly. "Do you—do you return, sir, or have we given you good-by for good?"

"Why, d'ye think I'm enamored of the country, child?" he said, watching her with his keen gaze.

Barbara laughed lightly. If he were so careless she would repay him in his own coin. "Surely as much," she said, "as the country is enamored of you."

His eyes twinkled. "Is't young Faversham you mean?" he asked. "Who is't, Barbara?" He put out a hand and took hers. "I am gone for a week, my dear—no longer, as I live. Do not forget me. Maids have fickle hearts." He carried the hand swiftly to his lips, took off his hat, and with a graceful bow was gone.

Barbara stood in the gateway forgetful of her father and her mother, reckless that she might be seen, and watched the chaise drive down the Beaulieu road; and her bosom was rising and falling with an amazing breathlessness and a wonderful pain.

It happened that same morning that Gilbert Faversham rode into Brockenhurst quite early for the pur-

pose of carrying out the programme which had been arranged, as he considered, between Sir Piers and himself. At the Rose and Crown he learned that the man he sought had taken flight for London, which news filled him with bitterness and chagrin.

"He be gone an hour since, sir," said the hostler.

"He has fled from me, he is afraid to meet me, the cur," said Faversham to himself over and over again, being unwilling to believe in his fury that the baronet had not even thought him worth while thinking of. But presently he heard something that pricked him into action. Sir Piers had ordered a chaise for Winchester—that was certain; but the hostler was puzzled why he should make for Winchester through Setley.

"'Twill take him ten miles from his road, if he be going by Beaulieu," he said, with an air of reckoning.

"Setley!" said Faversham, and the instant after was in the saddle again, and galloping along the road to Lymington; for it had flashed upon him that Sir Piers had gone to Moyden.

Arrived at the crossroads beyond the heath, Faversham turned sharply and went down toward Boldre, finally bringing up in front of Moyden. He was in a state of storm, but contained himself, so that nothing of his irritation should come out. Indeed, it was impossible that the Squire or Mrs. Garraway could guess at that, as they knew nothing of the quarrel. Only Barbara would suspect, and Barbara he did not see. For this he was thankful on two grounds, one of which was that he shrank from facing her. He, too, had spent a restless night, and knew not what to think. He dis-

trusted that stranger from London, and hated him fiercely with a jealous heart. He would not believe that the man was earnest in his attentions; he was but lingering like a butterfly over a wayside flower, and would fly away, leaving mischief behind him. The question that exercised Faversham's soul was conveyed in this belief. Sir Piers had flown—was the mischief done? *What* mischief had been done? He was in an agony of mind, which he would perhaps have been spared had he seen Barbara's haughty expression when she left the barn. That defiant and indignant mien would have told him the truth, would have proclaimed her for what she was, for what he had always held and reverenced her—the innocent and wayward girl who had not yet awoke to find life a momentous problem.

It was from Mrs. Garraway that he got his information, and calculated that Sir Piers was full half an hour ahead of him. From that lady he also incidentally heard that Barbara was indisposed. She had come down pale, had slept ill, and who could wonder even after the posset, when she had been drenched to her skin in the abominable storm? Faversham rode off as soon as he might extract himself from the lady's civil company. He was on thorns to be gone and on the chase after that iniquitous scoundrel. Barbara ill! Aye, now he knew at once that his suspicions and his fears and his guesses were well founded. He took horse at full speed, and galloped fiercely on the road to Beaulieu.

Midway upon Beaulieu Heath, a wide and desolate wilderness, Sir Piers heard sounds in his rear, and looked

back with idle curiosity. What he saw was a single horseman riding fast and throwing an arm into the air as if in signal. Sir Piers regarded the performance with cold indifference, and then turned his head again. But the sounds had attracted the attention of the postilion, and both he and the valet stared over Sir Piers's head in the direction of the rider.

"Keep your eyes to the front, and mind your business," said Sir Piers peremptorily, and the two pairs veered about on the instant. But the postilion stirred the horses to a quicker pace, for this was a lonely heath, and they were as yet a mile or more from Beaulieu. It was midday and light enough, to be sure, yet how was it possible to gauge the folly of a tobyman? At any rate, reflecting that all things were possible under the sun, as well as under the moon, the postilion pricked his team forward in some anxiety. This was not allayed when the nearer approach of the horseman enabled them to discover that he was calling upon them to stop. The invitation caused the postilion to ply his whip harder than ever.

"Save us!" he cried. "'Tis one of the road."

But Sir Piers bade him bring to, and await the mad rider. He came up presently, his horse in a lather of spume, and himself red of face and disordered in his dress.

"Well, Mr. Faversham, what can I do for you?" asked Sir Piers coolly, taking in the situation.

"Sir, you shall come forth out of that and fight me; by God you shall, or I will horsewhip you where you sit!" panted the young man.

"It seems, then, that you give me no choice," said Sir Piers, in his satirical manner. "These fellows thought you came for my money. It appears it is only my life."

"You have jested all your life," broke out Faversham; "the time is come to put a term to it."

"You are going to do that?" queried the baronet politely.

"I will do my best, sir, I can promise you," replied the other abruptly.

Sir Piers reflected, and apparently resolved upon a course of action. He descended from the chaise. "Leave your horse with my man," he commanded, and, oddly enough, Faversham obeyed. The two walked aside, on to the moor.

"Now, Mr. Faversham," began Sir Piers briskly, and without any of his previous indolence of voice or *insouciance* of manner, "let us get to business. You want to fight me—here and now, I suppose?"

"Yes," said young Faversham curtly.

"If you had not been carried away by (let us say) your tempestuous gallop," said Sir Piers, with decision, "you would have been cool enough to see the impossibility of such a course. A duel among men of honor, like ourselves, must have witnesses, and those witnesses gentlemen of position. You propose to fight before lackeys! I must assume, sir, that 'tis your heated blood that has misled you."

"I will accompany you to Beaulieu, and we will find someone there," said Faversham quickly.

"Your company would naturally give me great

pleasure," observed Sir Piers ironically, "but I fear I cannot make it convenient to meet you. I am summoned to town on a matter of urgency which will not wait."

"Neither will I wait, sir," declared Faversham. He was still at a pitch of feeling where he could not trust himself, and he only managed to keep himself in hand by refusing to talk. If he had spoken through that vent in his silence he would have poured forth the violence of his pent-up feelings. He could have ground this man underfoot, believing what he did. But Sir Piers was imperturbable.

"You will wait, sir, until I find it convenient," he said quietly. "It is not you but I, who will determine the occasion of this duel you are bent on."

With an exclamation, Faversham lifted up the hand in which he held his whip to strike, but Sir Piers did not wince. "Put that down," he commanded in a sharp, stern voice, and involuntarily the younger man obeyed. "You would force a quarrel on me," pursued the baronet, in incisive tones. "Why? Because it pleases you to think I have come between you and a certain lady. Good God! man, be honest, and be not ashamed to father your actions and your motives."

"It is false," said Gilbert Faversham hoarsely. "And you know it is false. I will kill you for another reason. You know what you have done. Your career speaks for itself. There are a score of wrecks behind you, and such as you. And, by Heaven, the time is come to put a term to one at least of a worthless and libidinous crew."

He was moved by deep feeling now, and the truth

was out. Sir Piers raised his eyebrows in surprise, for he had not quite expected this. He knew not how widely those tales of royal intrigue had been bruited abroad into all corners of the land, and how coarsely they were shaped in the passage, and into what corrupt forms. It had astonished him that he, Sir Piers, the most fastidious and particular buck in town, should be confused with the ruck of vulgar gallants who crowded to Carlton House, or beset the clubs and gaming houses. He *was* Fashion; he did not follow Fashion, and even the Prince himself was not his master, although it suited him to be very kind to the Prince and even to oblige him with services at times. But this young man conceived him to be the gross libertine of public gossip, him who prided himself on never entering an affair save in the nicest manner, and in regarding the conduct of amours as the most consummate part of taste and education! He stood attentive to his thoughts for a little, and then he answered:

"I believe you're an honest man, Mr. Faversham, but I cannot regard you as well informed. You seem to me to grow suspicions as a brier grows thorns. And what is worse, you would drag in a lady's name for the sake of those wild guesses. Sir, if I were to make so bold with any of that sex I would at least be sure of my justification. Great Heaven! man, where are your reasons, where your evidence? You profess an esteem and more for someone, and yet you will credit the very worst of that same person. If that is youth's generosity and affection, I thank God I am of a sober age, and getting toward gray hairs."

"This is beating about the bush, sir," stammered Faversham, whom this attack had taken by surprise. "I have proposed a meeting to you."

Sir Piers's glance went through him. "You shall have the meeting, sir," he said gravely, "you shall have the meeting on your own terms and in your own place. But not now, no, not at Beaulieu, nor at Winchester. Go back and keep your counsel if you will, sit down and possess yourself patiently, and if in a week's time you are of this mind, why, you shall know where to find me in town." Here he took a piece of paper and wrote his name and address upon it. He handed it to Faversham, and still with great gravity added: "There are signs and witnesses in such cases, they tell me. The color or the air will tell its story, and I am not in any doubt that you will read the riddle one way or another, Mr. Faversham. I care not which. See that you read it. Yet, on second thoughts, I should be reluctant to kill you." He gave a slight bow as he finished, and began to walk deliberately toward his carriage; and so much had his manner and his words worked upon Faversham that he made no attempt to follow him. He stood indecisively, and with something of cloudy mind, watching the receding figure. Sir Piers, on arriving at the chaise, ordered the young man's horse to be led to him, and Faversham received it mechanically from Horner. The chaise rolled away without more exchanges between the men, and Faversham mounted and turned back. In his heart he was suddenly aware how monstrous his course had been and how terrible his distrust—if what he feared were not true. This thought, rising to for-

midable dimensions so swiftly, frightened him, made him forget altogether the disappearing carriage, and turned his attention to Barbara, whom he might have wronged so cruelly.

In this crestfallen condition he arrived at the gates of Moyden, but, finding his courage fail him, pushed on to Brockenhurst, where he spent an unprofitable time at the inn. He dined in solitude, unable to decide either to return to Ringwood or to pay a visit to the Squire's house. The result of this vacillation was that he took more wine than was good for him, and at length drank himself into a state of determination. He would see Barbara and set his doubts at rest, armed with which resolve he started late in the afternoon for Moyden once again. This time he got off his horse and boldly knocked on the hall door.

He was very pleasantly welcomed by that hospitable woman, Mrs. Garraway, who would have him stay to supper, and, Barbara not appearing, he lingered so late that this became a necessity. He remembered what her mother had said in the morning. Barbara was indisposed! Somewhat awkwardly he put a question about her, and learned that she was abed.

"Abed!" he cried, with a start, and then, with signals of discomposure, proceeded quickly to some other topic.

By chance, as was natural, the lady would come back to Sir Piers Blakiston, that most elegant dandy, sounding his praises and repeating any of his tales or *jeux d'esprit* that she had been able to store in her memory. It need not be said with what feelings poor Faversham listened to this.

"Yes, madam, he is very handsome."

"I have no doubt, madam, he has made many conquests."

"For me, I have no wish to play the tailor to the fashions."

"It is true he is in favor with the Prince."

"His repute is not very nice, they say, in town."

But this last rejoinder, struck from his bruised spirit, was not only injudicious, but controversial; it roused the lady.

"Indeed, Mr. Faversham," she said indignantly, "I have lived long enough to know how to regard scandal and censorious tales. People are actuated by jealousy and the love of backbiting, as you will find when you are older. For my part, I do not credit all I hear, and I should advise you to do the same. Sir Piers is a man of position and much influence. What does that very fact do but bring him into the sphere of gossip, and set tongues wagging?"

"Oh," says Faversham impatiently, "he is an angel; you can see his wings."

Mrs. Garraway looked at him with asperity, but, being a kindly soul, observed also that he had a troubled face. Then it was that she insisted that he should sup with them, an invitation he would have refused had it not been for what fell from her casually.

"There is Barbara stirring, sure," she said, listening. "Poor child, she was wet to her naked flesh, and had no sleep last night."

No sleep! Was not here the troubled conscience? And yet Faversham himself had had no sleep, if he

would but have remembered. His eyes glowed on the mother; he was undergoing a second reaction.

"Will Miss Barbara sup?" he asked, and heard that she would.

"She will be rested," explained Mrs. Garraway. "She must be very hungry. The child is not well."

She is not well! He ground his teeth, for he could see in this indisposition the results of a mental commotion; and, as the reflection was perturbing his spirit, Barbara entered. She gave him a little bow, very coldly, and spoke to her mother. She was dressed very prettily, in white over pink, was girdled by a pink sash, and a thin lawn tucker veiled her bosom. Faversham had risen and stood unable to speak, conscious of a feverish desire that she should look at him. If he could only see her face, he thought, he could interpret it. He wanted that her glance only should fall his way, and from that he could read everything; for he could not endure that their eyes should dwell upon each other. He knew, indeed, that his would drop ere they had recognized the shame that would start into her face. But Barbara kept her face aloof, inquiring after her father, and making immaterial remarks about the household. Faversham had not spoken a word when the Squire entered fresh from his farm, and demanded heartily if supper was ready. The long dining room with the open fireplace and the paneled walls was cheerfully alight when they sat down, Barbara, as it happened, by Faversham. The Squire was in admirable spirits, and regaled the table with news of his live stock, something coarse, if innocent in intention. Barbara kept her

eyes down, and Faversham ate hurriedly. Presently the conversation turned to Sir Piers. Was the subject never to cease?

"Sir Piers will be supping in Winchester," said Mrs. Garraway, with a complacent smile, as of one who is privileged to follow the movements of some considered person in his passage to town.

The Squire grunted, and drank his ale, inviting Faversham to fill his tankard.

"I suppose we shall not see him again," went on the lady, with a little sigh. "He is greatly busy about the Court. It cannot be expected that he will think of his friends in the country."

"We sha'n't see him again," said the Squire complacently. "There's no place for bucks of that kind here."

Barbara said no word.

"Damme, now," pursued the genial Squire, grinning, "I should like to know whom he had in the barn, hey, Faversham?"

Faversham started, and pushed his plate away in his agitation. Mrs. Garraway looked from one to the other in interrogation. Barbara's face perceptibly altered, and Faversham was aware of it, though he dared not look at her. "Some girl he should not, I'll warrant," continued the rude, jocose voice.

Faversham started up in his chair. At that moment he hated the Squire and Sir Piers and Barbara all in an equal hatred.

"I must be going, Squire," he said almost inarticulately.

"Nonsense," responded the Squire. "Sit down, boy; sit down and fill Barbara's glass. Barbara, girl, ye're not taking your wine. 'Tis good wine, and will bring color to your cheeks. Where's your color, girl?"

"She's been awake half the night," explained Mrs. Garraway. "'Tis a wonder she's not abed now with fever."

Barbara said nothing, but for the first time turned her eyes on Faversham, and in them he might have read scorn and aloofness. What he did read was shamelessness and defiance. He stiffened himself, and recklessly plunged into talk. He hated her, and how beautiful she was!

"Indeed, sir," said he, "you are right. His reputation is such that we might expect any conduct of a man like him."

"Whom d'ye speak of?" asked the Squire, puzzled and then remembering. "Oh, Sir Highflier! Well, 'tis not a bad fellow on the whole. Gad! he nearly had me off the saddle, Gilbert!" and he chuckled at the recollection.

Barbara's eyes now gleamed on Faversham not only with contempt, but with anger. She flashed at him, while in his heart there was room for the one feeling only, a fierce passion against an abandoned creature. Yet this feeling was complex, being blent of anger and the horrid infatuation of her charms. He met her gaze with boldness now, and even with cruelty in his stare.

"Depend upon it, sir, 'twas no virtuous woman was there," he said, with impetuous emphasis.

"Ho! ho!" shouted the Squire. "You are mighty censorious, Gilbert," and winked at him; but Mrs. Garraway intervened, begging to know on what subject they talked. Her temper was a little ruffled, and said she to her husband:

"If the talk must drift this way, sir, I will send Barbara from the table. I will not have my daughter keep taproom company."

"She has kept worse, she has kept worse! Look in her heart!" were the words that burned for utterance upon Faversham's tongue; but he made no response, and the Squire, laughing loud, put off his wife.

"Sure, then, Lucy, we must not give you the explanation you want, for we should offend deeper," he said, after which Mrs. Garraway maintained a disapproving silence, and indeed the whole table fell into awkward stillness. Faversham broke this by making a second attempt to go, but sat down again at the Squire's insistence, a flabby and miserable spirit, neither knowing whither he was drifting nor caring what happened. Barbara still held her peace, and it was not until the women were gone that even the Squire had much to say. After that event he grew loquacious, and sat down to his wine like a country gentleman, expecting the same of his guest.

"Faversham," said he, with a knowing jerk of his head toward the door through which his wife and daughter had vanished, "d'ye see how she's took with that fine bird, hey? Lord! I could laugh to hear her praising him, with his slow and careful tongue, afraid, damme, of tripping over a word, eh? If I don't know English

better than that, why, dub me Dutch, my boy. These fine gentlemen from town, Gilbert, will spice and season their talk with French. I'm no damnation Frenchy. English is what my fathers talked, and, love ye, 'tis good enough for me. Not but what that Sir Piers was a good sort, say I. No, 'a has spunk and spirit, and 'a can drink fair with most. Faith, he has had the best part of a bottle of brandy, and talked as deliberate as ever, damn him! There was me, plying him to get the fellow tipsy, and him not so much as bothered by a single letter in his speech. I guess they ha' learned that with the Prince."

"He struck you," said Faversham angrily, pouring out a big beaker of wine.

"Whoa, there, steady!" said the Squire, in disapproval. "Struck me! That he did not. Took the whip out of my hand, that's what he did. And why shouldn't he, lad? I would ha' struck *him* else. I give him no blame, not I. Every man for himself, I say."

Meanwhile, in the drawing-room Mrs. Garraway and her daughter were discussing the same man. The elder woman's curiosity had been roused and her indignation provoked by the covert references to some escapade of Sir Piers, and she was by nature so communicative that she could not refrain from broaching the matter to Barbara.

"These men, they can do naught but backbite and carry tittle-tattle," she said over her embroidery. "Talk of women, my dear! No two women are a match for your man at real scandal-mongering."

"They have nasty minds and foul tongues," said Barbara, with sudden and unexpected vehemence.

Mrs. Garraway regarded her with surprise, but made no comment. She wandered, instead, to a more pleasant topic. "Sir Piers will be eating his supper in Winchester," she remarked for the second time. "He will soon be in the gay world again," and heaved a tiny sigh of sincere regret. Again Barbara said nothing. She made an attempt to escape early to bed, but her mother kept her in talk, and at last they heard the feet of the men in the hall. Mrs. Garraway looked up with a frown, as if she were in hopes they would pass by and enter the Squire's room, while Barbara remained as cold as ever. But they broke in noisily, the Squire laughing hilariously, and Faversham flushed and confident. He sat in his seat, paid compliments to Mrs. Garraway with quite a dexterous wit, and begged of her a song.

"Not I," she said, well enough pleased, "ask Barbara. My voice is gone. I am an old woman," at which he made another pretty speech, and gazed defiantly at Barbara, who met him with impassive indifference.

"Sing, Barbara," commanded the Squire.

The girl hesitated, and then set down her needlework and went to the six-legged harpsichord that stood near the window. The fire threw up the mellow tones of the old walnut and rosewood and flashed upon the pink of her sash. She opened the lid and lighted the candles in the sconces pensively; then she sat down and sang in a pretty, mellifluous voice:

"My mother bids me bind my hair
With buds of rosy hue,
Tie up my sleeves with ribbons fair,
And lace my bodice blue."

As she sang, the melody and her voice worked upon Faversham. Unconsciously he rose and moved toward the window; his eyes were fastened on her, and from where he stood her profile was illumined. His gaze never stirred from her, wandering from the nape of the small white neck, above which the brown hair was gathered in a knot, to the tremulous throat and the moving bosom. He could recall so many times when he had seen her and thought her lovely, yet none so lovely as now, when her delicate notes floated through the room, charming with their sweetness and sincerity. She was conscious of him, where he stood, but kept her eyes before her, and sang on with soft, pathetic meaning:

"For why, says she, sit still and weep
While others dance and play?
Alas! I scarce can go nor creep
Now Lubin is away."

Gilbert Faversham started. He had paid little heed to the words; it was the air that had reached his heart. What was it she sang? Ah! there was meaning in the song, meaning in her sad, passionate voice, and meaning in her cold eyes. *Now Lubin is away!* He saw the significance of the situation, and was moved deeply. An utter despair swept down and overwhelmed him. He

stood miserable, humbled, and without power to struggle or oppose, as the greatness of his immediate loss dawned on him. And then it was that Barbara shot a glance at him for the first time:

> "The village seems asleep or dead
> Now Lubin is away."

His strong young figure, stalwart and lean, swaying a little, and his handsome face pale through the tan of health and sunshine, he looked drooping to the point of tears. Barbara put her lips demurely together and struck into another tune. This was an old ballad of the west, and ran to a taking air; but Faversham had never heard it, for, though it was a favorite song with the Squire, it was deemed too rude and vulgar by his lady. Yet Miss Barbara broke into it now:

> "Come hither, son Jan, since thou art a man,
> I'll gie the best counsel in life;
> Come, sit down by me, and my story shall be,
> I'll tell how to get thee a wife.
> Iss, I will! Man, I will!
> Zure I will!
> I'll tell how to get thee a wife! Iss I will!"

But no sooner was the impudent intention of the young lady manifest than her mother rose.

"Barbara!" she called, "Barbara, miss! I will not have you sing that."

"Leave her alone. Let the lass sing it," grunted the Squire; and, as his daughter had ceased in obedience

to the voice of authority, but still continued the air on the harpsichord, himself flung a bar or two in his wife's face, very broad:

"The first pretty lass that Jan did see pass,
A farmer's fat daughter called Grace,
Had scarce said 'How do,' and a kind word or two,
Her fetched 'un a slap in the face.
Iss, her did! Man, her did!
Zure, her did!
Her fetched 'un a slap in the face! Iss, her did!"

The Squire ended with great unction, and, getting up, beckoned to his young friend, as if suddenly remembering more important business. Faversham looked indecisively at him. He was called to drink afresh in the Squire's room, and yet—and yet— He glanced at Barbara, who was idly rambling over the keyboard. What did she mean? Why did she sing that song? There was some spirit of mockery in her. She cast a glance at him, but he could make nothing out of her serene expression. It was as the face of a sphinx. The Squire called again, and he turned and went to the door, bewildered. Barbara turned about on her stool and looked after him.

"La, mamma, how stupid men are!" she said, and broke into laughter.

"Barbara, miss, I will send you to bed if you behave so unseemly another time," said her mother sharply. "Think if Sir Piers had been here to hear you."

"I think he would have been much amused," said Barbara lightly, and went back to her needlework and her book.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE GATE

When near ten o'clock Faversham bade good night to the Squire, and came into the hall, he pushed open the door of the drawing-room to make his adieus to the ladies. Mrs. Garraway had gone to the kitchen to attend to household affairs, and Barbara sat reading. He paused, abashed, for a moment, and then went forward.

"I am come to say good-by, Miss Barbara," said he.

"Oh, good-by, Mr. Faversham," she answered lightly. "I hope you'll have a good journey."

He made no reply, for he scarcely knew how to begin, and she went on, as if conscious of the silence:

"There is a moon getting up. You will be lighted."

He was steadied by the wine he had taken, but was still emotional, and his frank nature asserted itself, now that he saw her alone for the first time.

"I parted with a friend of yours to-day," he said awkwardly.

"Indeed!" she said, with little appearance of interest.

"'Twas Sir Piers Blakiston," he blurted out.

She was all attention. "Sir Piers!" she said quickly. "Where did you see him?"

"'Twas on the way to Beaulieu," he said.

"You—you did not fight?" she burst forth anxiously.

He shook his head. "No," he said bluntly, "I wished to force him to it, but he bade me go back."

She leaned back again and laughed. "He was quite right. You would be a pair of ninnies to fight about nothing." Yet it would have been about her, and she was not at all displeased, even with Faversham.

"It was about that night," he went on, in his impolitic frankness. "The barn——"

"I know not by what right you introduce me into your quarrels," said Barbara haughtily; "I should have thought you had done mischief enough."

"Nay, Miss Garraway," he said, collecting himself, and recovering something of his old attitude, "I will suffer no man to put you in a false position—to—to distress you and embarrass you—" He stumbled over his words, and she said coldly:

"I thought it was you who had embarrassed me, Mr. Faversham. Sir Piers was kind enough to aid me in an unpleasant predicament. 'Twas your bungling that made the distress."

But that provoked him. "What! To see you there with one of his reputation!" he said. "I could not stand by and let you blunder so."

"Blunder!" she echoed, with displeasure. "Indeed, Mr. Faversham, I think you presume very far on our old acquaintance."

"Miss Barbara," he pleaded, "you will persist in misunderstanding me. If 'twas I blundered, it was all

in your interests. You are a girl, and know not the world, and what sort of wickednesses there are."

"And pray," she asked, with disdain, "in what could your interference assist me when I was but enjoying a common civility from a gentleman? You are anxious to show me that you were acting in my interests. I ask you, sir, pray how?"

"I distrust Sir Piers Blakiston," he stammered.

"Distrust Sir Piers, sir?" she echoed. "Well, distrust him if you will. What is that to me? What is that dislike of yours to do with me?"

"Do you not see," he blundered on in confusion, "that I was afraid—I—I wished to protect you—I——"

"Protect!" she repeated, gaping at him in astonishment. "And do you think Sir Piers would offer me insult? Do you suppose a gentleman of his position knows no better than to affront a lady?"

He made a gesture with his hands, as if indicating the helplessness of explaining.

"I thought he would take advantage of—of your ignorance," he said gloomily and in despair, out of his masculine folly.

It was a bomb that exploded in the quiet room. Barbara's face flamed, her hands clinched tightly, and she took a step toward him.

"You—you thought— Ah, how dare you—how dared you? How dare you stand there and tell me so? It is infamous. Then you thought I was—oh, mercy!" She covered her face with her hands and sobbed. "I have never been so affronted. Go; you are a coward to

wound me so. I will tell my father, and he will whip you from the house. O Heaven, that anyone should say this to me, that any should believe me that!"

Gilbert Faversham, in the whirl of the emotions he had aroused, stood stupefied and discomfited; yet in his heart grew a sense of relief which for all his uncomfortableness was pure joy. He had hurt her, but he had learned the truth by that very blow. And now that he had brought her to tears, being a generous soul, of impulsive sincerity, he made up his mind swiftly not to spare himself. He deliberately rushed to destruction.

"I not only thought it possible, I thought it accomplished," he said, in a very low voice, which, nevertheless, was clear and firm.

So devious and inconstant are the emotions of woman, and so fickle is her reason, that this deeper affront, instead of increasing the misery and shame of the girl, acted as an irritant. She was braced by the abominable confession, and once more confronted him with her full stature, her heaving bosom, and her flashing eyes.

"You had better go," she said, in a tense voice.

"I am going," he answered humbly; "I ask your pardon." And on that simple plea he went.

Yet it was odd that, despite the righteous anger and indignation of Barbara Garraway, the young man went to bed with a lighter heart than he had carried for many days. He rose, too, experiencing the same buoyancy, and when he came whistling to his breakfast, it was to find a letter from town, just come by the mail coach. This was from the Horse Guards, and acquainted him that he had been granted a commission in accordance

with his request, in His Majesty's ——th Regiment of Foot. He was ordered to report himself forthwith.

With this news, then, he appeared that same afternoon at Moyden, and found a sympathetic listener in Mrs. Garraway.

"I have told none before you, Mrs. Garraway," he said, in his boyish way, "save my mother, who is sad, dear soul, that I must leave her."

"Indeed, but I would be proud," declared Mrs. Garraway, "and I hope it will prove a ladder to you, Mr. Faversham. There is nothing higher than to fight for one's country; 'tis a duty that is sacred; and a privilege, as the vicar said last Sunday. But I hope you will not be wounded, my boy; and oh, Gilbert, how your poor mother must be sorrowful! I'm glad you're no boy of mine," with which string of inconsistencies she proceeded to call on her husband and Barbara to come and admire.

But Barbara was out, and it was not until later that he came upon her in the meadows by the little river. He had not looked for her, and was not expecting to find her, but was returning alone from a visit across the woods in the Squire's company. Abashed as he had been by his grave blunder of the previous evening, he was no coward, and his legs refused to run away. On the contrary, they bore him toward her, and did not quake even at her icy demeanor.

"Miss Garraway," he said, with some eagerness, "I asked your pardon last night, but heard nothing from you. I am going to ask it again in the hope of a better answer than silence; and I ask it now because I am leaving the Forest."

"That is most melancholy news," said she, with a scornful laugh. "Yet if I may see the last of you, I may manage to forgive you. On no other terms, I assure you."

He flushed. "I must take my punishment," he said, "but I wish it had been less hard. Yet when I am away it will comfort me to know that you bear no ill-will to me for an unhappy mistake."

"Mistake!" she cried, as if the paltriness of the word irritated her. "You insult me deeply, and then call it a mistake! Oh, I wish I had a man's equanimity and shamelessness."

"If I offended against you, at least I suffered," he said, with feeling. "I was in hell."

She glanced at him curiously, and fingered the marsh marigolds she had plucked, but she said nothing. It may have been that she wished to hear more.

"I suffered the torments of the lost day and night," he said, his voice growing rougher with feeling as he realized now what he had undergone. "I would have torn him from his chaise and struck him in pieces."

"You had no right, whatever you thought," she said coldly.

"I did not ask for right—I thought nothing of right. I should think nothing of right. If it were so I should do it," he said simply.

"It could be no business of yours," said Barbara, giving him, unseen, another glance.

"I care not. I love you. I loved you the more when I thought—I loved you the more that I hated him."

Again she was momentarily silent, but her next

words, cold as they were, might have shown him signs of weakening.

"For what you have thought and done no self-respecting woman would let you see her face again."

"I shall not—I am going. Let me take your forgiveness," he said humbly.

"When do you go?" she asked evasively.

He told her, and added that the King had given him a commission, not with any pride or satisfaction now, but merely as an explanation. Her start betrayed her interest at this announcement. "You are going abroad—to fight?" she inquired.

"I do not know yet," he said. "Maybe I shall be sent to Spain, but I am to join at once. I shall know when I get to London."

"You do not leave till Friday," said Barbara meditatively. "I will answer you before then. I feel too strangely just now to trust myself."

And with this answer he went away, not wholly content, but pacified, if sad, while Barbara looked after him. It had seemed odd that he should leave her, he who had never before done such a thing of his free will, but had to be dismissed. She had said that she felt strangely, but in point of fact this was an exaggeration. The discovery of what he had thought her capable, and of what she had never for a moment considered in relation to herself, had come upon her with a terrible shock, simply because it was a strange idea to an innocent maid. Yet, brought to close quarters with it, introduced to it, on familiar terms with it, so to say, she was no longer frightened by it. Its effect was dulled for her, and she

supposed that men regarded the matter very differently from her own sex. They had a crude, savage way of approaching most things, and here, no doubt, was an instance. Consequently, what occupied her mind most at this moment of his withdrawal was not his terrible offense so much as the statement he had made that he loved her the more for her imaginary fault. This thought had an odd effect upon her, which she could not have analyzed if she had tried, and there was no one less likely to try than she. She had not settled what course she should take in regard to Gilbert Faversham, but was satisfied that he would come to see her again before leaving for London. She envied him London, dwelled wistfully upon the beaux and the fashionable ladies, and even thought with a pang that Gilbert would be privileged to see rank and beauty in the Mall. After which her thoughts veered to Sir Piers, and she forgot his rival.

The humiliation under which he labored was evidenced in his punctilious abstention from Moyden. He went about his preparations for leaving busily enough, but with a heavy heart; for it appeared to him all too plainly that he had lost Barbara, had lost even the chance of her. Now she, on her side, had not looked for this honest withdrawal, so harmonious with the spirit of the unspoken bargain; and the result was to pique her. She would have written to call him to her had she seen how to do so without loss of dignity, but it was impossible to invite him to come and receive her forgiveness. The position touched her sense of the ludicrous. Nor was it of avail to write a letter of pardon, for that pardon,

thus conveyed, would be understood upon the terms which she had laid down, and would effectually banish so loyal a conscience from her presence forever. Absence was to be the price of pardon, if pardon there might be. Barbara was irritated with herself and angry with Faversham—when on the evening before the day fixed for his departure he presented himself at the Manor.

He turned a friendly face to the Squire and Mrs. Garraway, but to herself his attitude was one of aloofness and respect. He chattered, when he forgot, of what might happen in the wars, and was clearly excited when he broke out with the news that his regiment was under orders for Holland.

"We are to serve under Lord Chatham in the Waldersee expedition, sir," he explained eagerly to the Squire. "I believe we have been picked as a choice regiment. I hope I have not forgot my military work. 'Tis kind of those to give me the commission when so many are begging."

Barbara's eyes twinkled with an appreciation of the ironic situation, yet she too was moved. Gilbert Faversham was going to fight the French in Holland! It brought actual facts near, threw the war into a proper perspective, and even caused thoughts to grow and magnify. But, his glance falling on the girl, he underwent a change in manner and voice; he was struck cold as the ash out of which all heat is fled.

"I am come to bid you good-by," he added lamely.

The Squire would not hear of his departure. If he were for the wars to-morrow, they should drink to his success and Boney's ruin ere they parted; for which pur-

pose Barbara fetched the glasses. Handsome she was beyond all seeming, and handsomer than ever as she lifted a glass of ruby wine at her father's command, and sipped a toast to the expedition.

"There will be bloody fields in Holland," said the Squire, with unction. "Gilbert, my boy, don't you reckon on a feather-bed, hey? The Dutchies, they say, have a land full of hollows and rivers. By God, sir, they'll run red, they will, when our lads get at 'em! I hate the Dutchies," says he, with emphasis; "I hate 'em like the Frenchies. Give 'em tallyho, Gilbert."

But when toasts had been drunk and civilities exchanged, Faversham rose to go. The Squire smacked him on the back with hearty good will, and Mrs. Garraway, in the warmth of her friendship, bestowed upon him two bottles of home-brewed cordial. Barbara put out her hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Faversham," she said. "I hope you will come back safe."

There was nothing more in her voice and manner than was required for politeness. He took her hand and went, with a dismal feeling at his heart. Out in the garden the birds were singing their last songs, and the blackbirds were clacking as they scurried from tree to tree. The sun had descended some time since, and the breath of a soft April evening came over the moor. He stood for a moment at the gate, holding his horse's bridle, and was aware of a rustling in the bushes. Next moment the laurels in the avenue opened, and a figure emerged. Faversham started, for he recognized it in an instant. Barbara met him there, at the threshold of the Manor,

as she had met Sir Piers to speed him on his way. She came forward simply.

"I came out to tell you that I had forgiven you," she said, and that was all.

At once he was overtaken with a tide of emotion. "It is good of you," he murmured, and took her hand. "I shall go away happier now. I was afraid——"

"Oh, how could I say it indoors, before papa and mamma?" she interrupted, with decision. "I promised to let you know, and I have done so."

"You are very good," he repeated, not seeing what next must be done. She did not deny it, but lingered, as if awaiting something more. He summoned his courage. After all, he was leaving never to see her again, and what he had to say was no crime. "I could not have borne your not forgiving me, because I love you, and I shall not see you again."

She laughed lightly, ignoring the protest of affection. "What heroics! Of course you will. You are not going to be killed. You will come back a colonel."

"But I must not see you again," he said.

She made no reply to this, but said, "Tell me about this expedition." He told her all he knew, which was not very much. "You will be spending some time in London," she said. He answered that he supposed so. "You will see the theaters and the sights, and everything," she pursued; "you will forget us country folk."

"I cannot forget those I love," he said indistinctly.

She made no reply, and something in the natural impetuosity of the man swept him on. Her hand, as he was conscious, still lay in his. "Miss Garraway," he

said, "you have forgiven me. For God's sake do more. I ask everything. I love you—I have loved you always. I would love you were you in the ditch. Yes, there is my offense; I know it. I know it, and I care not, so long as you know I love you. You are enthroned, dear, for me for always. Barbara! Barbara! Barbara!" He drew her closer.

"Let me go," she said; "you must not act so. I only came out to tell you I had forgiven. Let me go. You are foolish, and you are hurting me. Let me go."

"I will not let you go until you answer," he cried. "What shall it be?"

He strained her toward him, and in the twilight she looked up and saw a fine lithe figure, topped by a face she had known always and knew to be handsome. Something in his physical masterfulness appealed to her, and though she resisted, she did not answer him in the negative.

"Let me go," she murmured in distress.

"No, no," he whispered, carried away by her proximity and the fragrance of her hair and presence. "Kiss me, Barbara, kiss me. Do not let me go without a sign."

"You ask too much," she panted. "You are unkind. I am very fond of you when you are sensible."

"I am more sensible when I am near you," he said tensely.

She laughed a giddy little laugh. "Oh, how strong you are! You are pressing my wrist too tight. It will be black and blue. What is it you want me to say? Men are such brutes."

"Say you love me," he persisted.

"I don't—I don't know. How can I? Please let me go. There is someone on the lawn, and will hear us. I like you very much. How can I say any more?"

He drew her swiftly to him close, and kissed her with passion. "You shall be mine, dear," he whispered. "I will come back for you. Write and tell me I may come back for you."

The kiss fell on her lips, and burned there. She sobbed, out of a strange emotion of surrender and fear and shock.

"Will you write, dear? Write and tell me," he urged, and thought he heard between her tiny sobs a "yes." A light shone suddenly from the windows of the house, and a voice called loudly "Barbara! Barbara!"

He turned from her and passed out of the gate noiselessly, and not until he was some distance from it did he mount and ride for Ringwood. Barbara shrank into the shrubbery, frightened and still. The voice ceased, and the window shut. Then she moved out upon the lawn and went through the dusk among the trees toward the rear of the house. Once in the orchard she breathed more freely, and straightened her frock and tidied her hair. She had not expected that tempest of passion, but, though she had been alarmed, she was not angry. Somehow or other there strayed into her mind the recollection that she had parted with Sir Piers also at the gate, in a surreptitious way. He had not kissed her and demanded an answer so vehemently, so roughly. He had been most polished and elegant and— But she was not offended with Faversham.

When she entered the house her mother asked with some asperity where she had been.

"Listening to the thrushes in the orchard, mamma," she said dreamily, which in a way was true.

"You should not be out these chill spring evenings in a gown like that," commented Mrs. Garraway. "'Tis foolish after your wetting."

"I will not do it again," promised Barbara, but she went through the rest of the evening in a commotion.

CHAPTER IX

SIR PIERS IS APPROVED

MEANWHILE Sir Piers Blakiston in London found much in his neglected affairs and in the calls of Society to occupy his time and mind. He had to meet the raillery of his friends, among whom some story of rustic beauty had spread, and the Prince was chief of his tormentors. He took it well enough, being too safely established in his own esteem to be abashed by a trivial jest; indeed, by a trick of his, which was bold after his habit and consequently successful, so far from avoiding the topic, he cultivated it, and embroidered it with his wit.

"I found that it was but a wayside flower," he explained. "My eyes were dazzled, or I am getting old like His Royal Highness, and begin to turn to simplicity. A primrose, my dear Lord Cholmondeley, brings emotions to my heart now and tears to my eyes. You will observe it is so with the Prince also. So we move onward toward the end, accomplishing the specified round of nature."

And to the Prince himself he spoke with equal candor.

"I have returned defeated, and by a carpet captain. And from this distance now the grapes seem to me to look sour. I fear your Royal Highness would be of that opinion. In fine, sir, I have left the rose to bloom unseen and waste its sweetness on a country lout. It

is sweetbrier, sir, sweetbrier or maybe eglantine, but no more."

"'Tis the first time I've known you defeated, Blakiston," the Prince was good enough to say.

"Ah, I have been serving myself before, not someone else," remarked Sir Piers dryly and with audacity; at which His Royal Highness laughed good-humoredly.

He had, however, a different version of his exile for Lady Marston, whom he took an early opportunity of seeking.

This lady, a handsome ruin and a woman of diabolical recklessness, was bound to him by effectual ties of gratitude and interest. Moreover, she professed for him to her intimates an esteem and an admiration which she declared she could render to few. The Prince was getting old and dull, she averred, and it was only Sir Piers that kept him and his circle from the doom of the commonplace. She also recognized the beau as of kinship with herself. To this lady, who was not without considerable influence in high quarters, Sir Piers confessed half the truth.

"It is a good family," he said, "and draws from an ancient stock. But they will degenerate into bumpkins. You know, my dear lady, how to be planted out among cabbages would be to run the risk of transportation into the vegetables. Well, here's a pretty, handsome, sprightly girl, and she will be simulating Miss Hoyden if we don't rescue her."

Lady Marston cast him a glance, furtive and prying, as it were into his soul, but his urbane smile told her nothing. She laughed, and her laugh was one of the

charms that remained to her, free of cosmetics and powder.

"You are Don Quixote himself, Sir Piers," she said, "the savior of forlorn damsels and the champion of the wasted. La, you are too benevolent for this world. Well, I suppose you want the household here."

"Not," said Sir Piers pleasantly, undisturbed, "not, I think, my dear lady, the father. Papa is too gross and porcine in his mind. Moreover, he resembles a turnip. Now I come to think of it, he has become one—which is another reason why the child should not become a cabbage."

"No," said the lady dryly, "I see what she must become."

"A rose, madam, a rose," he answered, smiling.

"A cabbage rose," she said, laughing, and they seemed fully to understand one another.

Underneath the impeccable and placid manner which for the most part he wore, Sir Piers suppressed often a vehement nature. He was disciplined in a rigid school; the perfection of his learning in that school had advertised him to fame, and it was rarely that he let the useful mask drop from before him. Yet, although he was aware how far he carried the principle of suppression, and knew what his nature really was, even he was astonished to find how deeply this affair in a little insignificant village had engrossed him. He had spent all the years of his manhood in the pursuit of pleasure and in the advancement of his interests in the highest circles. It seemed ridiculous that at his time of life, and after all his experiences, he should be at heart impatient of Lon-

don and its claims, and anxious only to revisit a rural wilderness. To himself he did not explain it as to his friends, on the ground of age, but attributed it rather to satiety and a rightness in his taste.

"I have an eye," he thought. "I have always been acknowledged to have an eye, and there's none such as Barbara at Court. Her very innocence bewitches, and yet she has a sparkle with it. 'Tis like champagne to a weary guest at the feast of the flat and inevitable."

And those were his feelings, intensified even, as he drove down to Beaulieu some three weeks later. He was gone (so the fashionable sheet said) on a visit to a well-known nobleman in the Midlands, and would be absent a few days. The truth was that he had borrowed Sir Thomas Rankin's house by Beaulieu creek, a house which that young profligate never occupied, and would be glad to sell to the next buyer. It was as a possible purchaser that Sir Piers was now its tenant for a week. He had studiously avoided the danger of interpretations being put on his return, such as would have been incurred by taking up his old quarters at Brockenhurst. Moreover, his nice taste for comfort shuddered at the prospect of more country inns, and he had brought down sufficient of his effects to make him comfortable in his new house. He reached Beaulieu late in a soft afternoon, filled with very amiable thoughts and sentiments.

The heath from which they descended to the water had a fine bold look and the odor of the earth arose on all sides. The heaven was rose-and-gold in the west toward Moyden, where the sun had set already, and

against the mass of the distant Forest curled up spires of smoke, witnessing to the waste fires, or to an encampment of gypsies, many of whom were regular denizens of those wild tracts. Sir Piers was well content. He had some small presents with him, not so sumptuous as to alarm or stir wonder, but choice and becoming to both mother and daughter. He had a famous pipe for the Squire.

The house was small, solidly furnished, and comfortable. It stood above the creek with a little drooping garden behind, and before good lawns and a small open park. Standing off the road some distance, it saluted the eye in a friendly way, with its twinkling lights, as of one who has long been left in the cold, and is glad at last to welcome a visitor. Certainly, it was austere in its solitude, and Sir Piers quite understood how Sir Thomas came to distaste it. As he descended from his chair, the housekeeper came out to meet him, with a deep courtesy. The lessening lights of the west, shown on the full creek below, flashed and went out, leaving the water in darkness. If Sir Piers had been an imaginative man, he might have shuddered at a sense of chill which this extinction produced. As it was, he merely gave his orders for supper, and went into the house, followed by his man, Horner.

The evenings were not yet warm enough to render a fire unnecessary, and Sir Piers sat over against the hearth of his dining room till late at night. He played a game with his man, an admirable player, in order to keep himself in practice—after which he sat and smoked and pondered. A book lay to his hand on the table,

which he opened and read in, and then put back. It was a volume of plays by Congreve, but was clearly not interesting or fresh enough to absorb him. His acquaintances in town would have been amazed to witness Beau Blakiston throned in this strange solitude, and yet it was not at all unusual for him to spend some time in seclusion like an anchorite. The world saw him always in the front of Fashion and marked him as one of its prime votaries. So indeed he was, but his nature demanded occasionally to go into retreat, and exercise that part of his character which he repressed. On occasions he read a great deal, and formed his plans or meditated on his success in life. On this occasion he was, however, doing more by these things. He was engaged in conjuring up the image of a beautiful face, and in dwelling in fancy upon the changes which that varying expression might portray to him—in an emergency. He had not seen her face in the barn, but he had felt her quiver. On the other hand, he recalled how she looked after him as he rolled away from Moyden nearly a month before. How would she look when she saw him speeding back? The warm blood thrilled through Sir Piers Blakiston at the thought, annihilating for the moment all that singular power of control which he had gained by lifelong practice. For the time he was on fire and happy—ah, happier than as Beau Blakiston of Jermyn Street, happier than as Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone.

When he looked out of the windows next morning, a thin spring rain was threshing the sky, the mists hid the borders of the woodland, and the creek was humming below. It was a morning of happy April tears, through

which the sun broke smiling, scattering in flight the low-lying mists, and mounting with his stride the heavens. Sir Piers was never one to be moved by natural phenomena, yet insensibly the visible season of the year, the young growing grass, the lightning shoots, and the song and flurry of birds and nestlings, awoke in him chords of sympathy. It was good to be in town on such a day, but it was even good also to be in the country, rolling through a handsome landscape perhaps, with a pleasant fervor at one's heart. He reached Boldre by midday, and calculated with an internal grimace that he would be pressed to dinner, and would have the Squire and his lady for company; and so he came up before Moyden, his carriage halting at the very gates. As he did so, he observed a rustic with a spade who was gazing at him from an adjoining meadow. Noting this with a casual eye, he descended, leaving his presents in Horner's charge, and opened the gate. Then he was aware of a voice that shouted, and, turning saw the rustic gesticulating. As Sir Piers halted, he uttered some unintelligible words in an uncouth voice, and the baronet, without the slightest exhibition of interest, entered the gateway and went up the drive toward the house.

He had already reached the door and rung the bell when he saw Horner breathlessly approaching him.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the valet, "but there's the plague in the Manor."

"Plague!" said Sir Piers, staring. "What the devil does plague mean?"

"'Tis what they call it, sir, hereabouts. 'Tis the smallpox," says Horner apologetically.

Sir Piers regarded him without changing a muscle of his face. "I wish you would mind your own business, Horner," he said, in reprimand. "Go back until I call for you," and he turned and rang the bell again.

The door was opened by a maid, very solemn, very scared, and very important, who regarded him with astonishment.

"Is your mistress in?" said he.

"Sir, there is the smallpox"—she began, but was stopped by a peremptory gesture.

"I asked if your mistress were in," he said sharply, and was answered by the appearance of the lady in question.

"Oh, Sir Piers!" she exclaimed, holding up her hands lamentably.

"Madam," he asked, with polite deliberation, "will you be good enough to inform me who it is is ill in your house?"

"'Tis my husband," she said, and appeared on the verge of weeping.

Sir Piers's features showed nothing of what passed in his soul. His voice took on sympathy and encouragement. He condoled with her.

"And Miss Barbara?" he inquired very civilly.

"She is well, thank God," sighed the mother, and as if in response to her name Barbara stood before him. She was pale and beautiful, greeted him with no smile, acknowledged him merely formally and as if in abstraction. Sir Piers was clearly aware that he held no position of importance in that anxious house that day. He

was a cipher, to be met politely, but something in the way, and as insignificant as a bumpkin from a neighboring farm. Perhaps the better course would have been to withdraw in a hope of better times and a more favorable opportunity; but Sir Piers had the boldness of the true adventurer, cast up chances and took risks with imagination. He entered the hall.

"If it were possible that I might cheer Mr. Garraway"—he began very courteously, and was interrupted.

"Oh, sir, 'tis the smallpox," cried Mrs. Garraway in horror.

Sir Piers lifted a hand in gentle deprecation of this outcry. "I have a pipe that will fit him," he said pleasantly. "If Mr. Garraway will receive me—Miss Barbara, may I beg you will send one to find out."

"I have not seen him myself," she burst forth, in a pitiful voice. "They will not suffer it."

"Quite right—quite right," said Sir Piers, nodding in approval. "Young lives should not run risks—they have all before them. I think, madam," he said to Mrs. Garraway modestly, "that he will like my pipe. 'Twas chosen with great care by myself and the Marquis of Anglesey, who has a sure taste in pipes."

He held the ladies in talk while the message was sent explaining quite by the way his presence there. "I am guest to Sir Thomas Rankin of Beaulieu," he said, "for a day or two; and I gave myself the pleasure of revisiting a very pleasant spot, of which I have happy memories." He bowed to Mrs. Garraway, whose spirits had been insensibly affected by this dignified entrance and

this air of deliberate command. His very manner seemed to dismiss all illness as unnatural, and to relegate unhappiness to its proper distance. Nothing short of elegance and health was consistent with the atmosphere Sir Piers diffused. Mrs. Garraway unconsciously fell back into her old attitude with him; she smiled and was a little arch. To them descended a black-coated doctor, who offered his warning to the baronet.

"Pish, my good sir!" said Sir Piers, with good humor, and cast a look at Barbara. "I was inoculated in my fifth year, they tell me."

He moved up the stairway, smiling with encouragement on them, and presently disappeared into the sick room.

The Squire lay on his bed, his rugged face toward the door through which his visitor entered. He had the appearance of one who had struggled hard and been worn out, yet his grin spread on his face.

"What brings you here, hey?" he asked, in a ghost of his voice. "Where's this famous pipe, hey?"

"I will have it fetched, Mr. Garraway," answered Sir Piers gently. "I hope 'twill be useful to you. 'Twas chosen by Lord Anglesey and myself at Wotton's only last week," and he asked that Horner should deliver the pipe to the nurse. When it had arrived in the bedroom he presented it with a certain courtliness, and the Squire's eyes shifted from the pipe to him and back again. Then he spoke.

"What art doing here, Sir Piers?"

"I am staying with Sir Thomas Rankin, sir," answered the baronet, "a gentleman whom you may per-

chance know, and I made bold to venture across to-day with my little present."

"Have you brought Barbara one?" he asked, after a pause.

Sir Piers was slightly taken aback at the abruptness of the question, but did not show it. "A trifle,"—he spread out his hands,—"a gewgaw, my dear sir, such as women love. I hope she will like it."

"And I swear you've one for Lucy, hey?" asked the Squire, cackling and winking.

Sir Piers acknowledged that he had.

"'Tis easy to see what you're after," pursued the hoarse voice. "But what brought ye into the room here to see me? D'ye know 'tis the smallpox, and scares the whole countryside?"

Sir Piers shrugged his shoulders.

"Damme," said the Squire, eyeing him feebly and speaking in broad dialect. "You're better than I thought you." He rolled over on his pillow weakly. "You can have her if you will," he said, and seemed to grow unconscious to what was about him.

Sir Piers stood for some minutes waiting, but there was no sign or sound from the sick man. For those moments he was conscious, principally, of being worse, not better, than he had been thought. He was no coward, as his presence in the tainted chamber proved, and he was hard and obstinate. The Squire's valedictory message, as it might be termed, touched him not; or rather, he saw its dramatic value, and approved it, but it made no impression on his mind or purpose. All that he saw was that his plans must undergo a change, but whether

for the better or the worse he could not determine. He eyed the Squire equably, and then stole from the room without noise.

In the hall the doctor met him, to whom he beckoned as one with authority. When they were apart he asked bluntly:

"Will he live?"

The doctor meditated. "It is doubtful," he said. "'Tis a virulent case. We have had others in Lymington," to which he added, "I can give you deodorants, sir, which you would be wise to use."

"Thank you, I will use them," said Sir Piers, and leaving the physician, sought Mrs. Garraway. "I am at Sir Thomas Rankin's, madam," he said, "and shall be there for the present. I hope you will be good enough to let me know how Mr. Garraway goes on."

Mrs. Garraway promised distressfully, and Sir Piers made a step away very elaborately as Barbara entered.

"Please no nearer, Miss Barbara," he said. "'Tis not wise, believe me. I think Mr. Garraway enjoyed his little talk, and I hope he liked his pipe. He seemed brighter than I had thought, no doubt being on the mend. I had a trifle for my esteemed hostess, as well as my host," he continued smiling, "and I have taken the liberty to bid Horner deposit them in the hall. Miss Barbara will perhaps excuse an impudent attempt to choose for her." With the airy grace of this announcement, the most delicate suggestion of a gift only, he bowed and left the ladies and went out to the door, but Barbara moved forward quickly before her mother. He

held out a remonstrating hand, keeping her at her distance.

"You are too kind," she said, with emotion.

"I wish the time had been more felicitous," said Sir Piers.

By nightfall on the next day news came to him of the Squire's death.

CHAPTER X

BARBARA IS INTRODUCED TO SOCIETY

THE death of the Squire brought a considerable change. Mrs. Garraway took her blow with the resignation of the orderly mind, and kept and tended her household with the greater assiduity. She impressed upon Barbara the duty and privilege of Christian patience, and rehearsed the virtues of the departed Squire.

"He was a pattern to the county for honor, was your father, child," she declared, taking sad comfort in the reminiscences. "There was none more highly esteemed, and the Garraways have lived here for four hundred years. Their roots are in the soil. Your father was rough, poor dear, and he loved a bottle as well as any gentleman in the shire. There was none better at a badger hunt, they say, and I've had him come home a welter of mud and wet to his flesh. He will be missed, child," and she swung her keys meditatively.

It is certain that he was missed by his own house, this rude, masterful rustic, and Barbara wept out her eyes for a week. At the close of that time Sir Piers paid a visit of condolence, and was received in state. He was most considerate and friendly, and pressed his services on the widow. She should seek a change, he suggested, and with that smilingly recalled his own advice, given under happier auspices, that she should visit London.

Mrs. Garraway declared she had not heart for town, and would feel out of harmony with the gayety and lightness. Moreover, she had the affairs of the Manor to look to, and being a managing woman, capable and industrious, had already taken them in hand.

"It is a pity," said Sir Piers, and turned from the subject to his own departure. "I fear I shall see you no more. I go to-morrow," he said.

"You have been very kind," said the lady gratefully, and Barbara looked at him softly. But he had not said his last words; his ultimate farewell was for Barbara's ear. The sky was brilliant with sunshine and the trees were filling with leaves. That sweet wilding April had run her course and was near the gates of May. He had made his adieus to the mother, who, called back into the house by some domestic crisis, left him standing in the drive with Barbara.

"You do not fear the sun?" he said, and in answer to her look of inquiry, "Then walk, child, with me through the meadow. My chair is in Boldre village."

His air of authority was amiable but exquisite, and Barbara did not dispute him; this assumption of a right over herself even pleased her vaguely. They walked across the lane, and by a side path through the orchard, and over a stile into the meadow. Beyond loomed the fringes of the Forest.

"This is May, child," he said presently. "Things begin in town. You must come to London and regain your spirits."

"'Tis impossible, Sir Piers," she gasped.

He smiled. "That is a very fine word, child, on childish lips," he said. "You have cried half your bloom away. You must come to town. If your mother will not, Lady Marston shall write to her."

The girl's face flushed. "Lady Marston!" she said. "I have heard of her."

He darted a keen glance at her to discover what she had heard, but her face had blossomed only with surprise and pleasure.

"She is a great lady, is she not?" she asked.

"She is very well," said Sir Piers indifferently. "She is of tolerable blood, and has good manners. She knows the world. She is admirably kind."

Barbara made no answer, but looked at him gravely. If she was a country girl she was no fool, and she had her moments of doubt.

"Why do you this for me?" she asked presently.

"'Twill not be I, Barbara, but Lady Marston," he said evasively.

"That is not true," she said swiftly. "'Tis she will do it because you ask her. Why should you trouble with me—a mere country girl?"

"My dear, you cannot guess," he said in good humor, and looked at her quizzically.

She could not have endured a glance of affection; the passions which had moved her against her will in Faversham's farewell would have repelled her had Sir Piers at this juncture showed any sign of it. But he was quite friendly and good-natured, and that was all. He was sufficiently learned in the heart of woman to know that this was not the occasion for any manifestation of

his feelings. The girl would recoil, all her maiden innocence and shame in arms; he would never get her to London if he opened his heart and appeared in the character of a lover. With the inimitable and charming power which belongs to the sex of thrusting troublesome things from them, or rather of ignoring their proximity and menace, Barbara was merely conscious of a relation between Sir Piers and herself which she would not analyze, which had not as yet frightened her, indeed, which even tickled her vanity and gave her thrills of pleasure. At his good-humored rejoinder she smiled.

"I must go back," she said.

"Good-by, child," he said, with grave kindliness, and made no attempt to detain her. He walked through the wood with his head bent, swishing his cane at the grass. "Ravishing," he murmured. "She would dress to perfection. White or pink or blue—I cannot see one color which would not harmonize with those tones and that hair. I would have her in white. She would accommodate herself to society very fast. If I know anything of London town and human nature, there is no one who would make a quicker fame. *Espiègle!* She ravishes me." This meditation continued until he reached the village, where his carriage had been purposely left to wait him, and to give him the excuse for his walk.

Within a few days of this second departure, Barbara had a letter from Faversham, who was with his regiment at Dover and had received news of their loss. He wrote in a state of suppressed excitement, which was only subdued evidently out of a regard to the occasion of his letter.

He was in camp, and preparations were going forward, but not fast enough to please him. "We should be sailing now," he declared, "and give Boney a lesson before he can collect himself. If we delay longer, there will be a harder task and more knocks. A dash for the Scheldt, and Antwerp is ours! By the way, who do you suppose is in my regiment? Captain Miles, and no other: he is in another company, but very friendly. He is a fine fellow, but a little dull and obstinate, and, I think, a good soldier"—after which followed an appeal to the girl to write to him. "I can never forget how you forgave me, and how we parted. That is my best treasure, and will guard me safely in Dutch lands, and keep me secure from French bullets. You promised to write, Barbara, dear, and I am waiting. I know you will, but don't tarry too long. We may go at any moment."

The appeal, however, was fruitless, for Barbara was somewhat annoyed that he should have interpreted her attitude and conduct so freely in his favor. She remembered what had happened at their parting, but none too clearly, and it was clear that Gilbert Faversham regarded himself as tied to her. This she resented, for she was not in the mood to fancy shackles. With that amazing prospect of a season in town before her, she was impatient when her old life pulled her back. She was certainly not affianced to Gilbert, nor would be. It was preposterous. She would see the world ere she made her choice, and by gaining experience make it more wisely than the most of her sex, who either took the first eligible young man to hand, or had the pick of some half dozen

at the most. Accident and propinquity, she decided, settled most marriages; and they should not settle hers. Consequently, she looked forward to London, awaiting Lady Marston's letter even as poor Faversham awaited hers in his camp at Dover.

Lady Marston was clearly in no hurry, or, maybe, Sir Piers had forgotten his promise, for time slipped away without bringing the invitation. She had said no word to her mother, and so was forced to fret privately to herself. The passage of spring was marked broadly on the face of nature. The violets and daffodils, primroses and wood anemones of April had given place to cowslip, narcissus, and lily of the valley. The poppy blazed blood-red amid the young corn, and the lilacs were in flower upon either side of the drive. Pink and white in the water meadows bloomed the flower of the May. And in Barbara's heart reigned disappointment; but she was a sensible, healthy girl, and went about her duties.

"Never mind," said she, "I will go to Bath in the autumn to stay with Aunt Peggy."

You will perceive no morbid or undue craving after the excitements of a giddy life here; she betrays merely a wholesome vanity, a girlish curiosity, and a natural love of life and gayety. She sighed, but she was as healthy as a milkmaid, if not built upon the rude lines of the traditional milkmaid. There was never a sweeter patch of earth on which to grow fine maids, fine complexions, than within sound of those noisy shores, upon the uplands of the Forest, which take the sea winds daily, and are musical in spring with the thrush and chaffinch,

and in the autumn with the lilt of the robin and the love song of the yellow-hammer.

"Kiss me quick, quick, quick, and go," calls the latter from the hedgerows on the moors and commons; yet he had not begun to call when Mrs. Garraway received a letter from town in an elegant and sloppy hand, sealed and perfumed, and smelling of a fine lady. This fetched both the women to stare in wonder at it by the window.

"Oh," cries out the mother, "it is from Lady Marston."

"She is asking us to town," burst forth Barbara, unable to contain herself, and thereby betraying to anyone who had ears that she was already familiar with the business. But Mrs. Garraway did not notice. She read the letter with deep interest and reread it with growing emotion.

"There," she said in conclusion, "I knew it would come. I have been expecting it," and she nodded her head emphatically. "Lady Marston invites you to her house in London to see the season and for a change of air—says she. I see it all," and she looked with meaning on her daughter.

But Barbara, pink as she had turned, protested weakly. "Why should she ask me? I don't know her. The idea of going to London for a change of air!"

"You shall go, miss," declared her mother firmly. "I have settled it all in my mind. I can see what it all means." Barbara said nothing. "Do you not see how the invitation comes?" she asked.

"Is't Sir Piers?" said Barbara faintly.

Mrs. Garraway opened her letter again. "She writes that her old friend, Sir Piers Blakiston, has spoken of me, and of his felicitous time in the New Forest under my hospitable ægis. La, that's pretty of Sir Piers. 'Sir Piers has told me,' she says, 'of your daughter, by whom he was reminded of me, when (alas!) I was younger. If that be so, madam, I should love to see the image of my lost youth. Sir Piers vows that he owes you a return for your great kindness, and would have you to town for a season. Madam, I am at your disposal, yours and your daughter that should be mine. I wonder if she be so fair as I. My hair was corn golden when I was seventeen, but has turned of a deeper color. But I must tell you why I chiefly propose'— Ah, there is nothing more," Mrs. Garraway declared hurriedly, and folded the letter. "It is most civil and friendly of Lady Marston."

Barbara was certain that there was something more, as her mother's abrupt action had been significant, but she did not put any questions. She assumed an attitude which Mrs. Garraway interpreted as obstinate.

"I don't know Lady Marston," she protested.

"If Lady Marston, in her position about the Court, chooses to know you, foolish girl, what is it if you know her or not? Cease your objections. I tell you, you shall go. Your poor papa would have desired it that his daughter should mix in genteel society. I shall put matters in train at once. Stay, when does she ask you?" Again she consulted the letter. "The 25th of June. Sure, a very good time, and in the thick of the season. Barbara, you shall have the new black silk, and your

Aunt Peggy shall send you a frock from Bath. I will write her myself this night."

Barbara did not demur, yet privately resolved that Lady Marston should advise her in her gowns on her arrival in town.

Now that the invitation had come, and the girl was getting ready her dresses for the wonderful introduction to life, time passed rapidly enough. She was in mourning, it was true, but one of her figure and beauty was in no need of lighter colors to set herself off. On the contrary, it was avowed by her friends Betty and Belinda Travers of Bowall Green that she was ravishing in black.

"Your complexion is so delicate," they declared, "that the black enhances it, dear," which was true enough. Barbara herself at this period was more than half disposed to resent the incumbrance of mourning. She had a delightful blue satin gown and a flag-yellow frock which she would fain have worn. But her mother was inexorable, and she set off with her somber finery one morning in company with her maid, Martha, bound for Southampton. For at Southampton she was to purchase some things that were lacking to the outfit. It was, in a way, as though Mrs. Garraway had been dressing a bride for the altar, had been equipping a wife with her trousseau.

The carriage went by Beaulieu to Southampton, with James, the hostler of the Rose and Crown, as postilion. He was a very friendly fellow, as was natural in one who had known the young lady all her life. He turned on his horse to point out with his whip any marks upon the landscape that struck him.

"And here 'twas," says he, in the middle of the heath, "that Master Gilbert Faversham came up with Sir Piers one day when I was a-driving him to Winchester. 'Stop that shay,' cries out Master Gilbert; and Sir Piers, he looking round out of his eye, without turning a head, 'We are called on to stop, my man,' he says; 'is't a 'way-man? Can ye tell me?' But when I saw it was Master Gilbert, I grinned. 'Do as the gentleman tells you,' says Sir Piers, very bland, and so we reined in the horses. Down gets Sir Piers very lazy, and confronts Master Gilbert. 'Is't my money or my life?' he says, with his drawl. 'Damme,' says Master Gilbert, saving your pardon, miss, and then they walked aside; and I see them out of my eye as near pistols as ever two men was. 'Tis said they quarreled over cards, and Master Gilbert could not abide Sir Piers's town manners," concluded the postilion dispassionately.

"Did they nearly fight?" asked Barbara eagerly.

"As near as a hairbreadth, miss," said James. "I was looking for to carry home a corpse, for certain."

Barbara drew a deep breath and looked with interest toward the spot which was now fast receding. After all, one cannot expect to be indifferent to the first great quarrel that rages over one's beauty at nineteen. It was very sad, but Barbara enjoyed it, and after staring long, turned and fell into a reverie. This was broken frequently by James's voice, instructive again.

"Yonder's Sir Thomas Rankin's house, by the creek," he said, "a mighty lovely place, and one where there's been strange doings, they do say."

"What strange doings?" demanded Barbara, look-

ing with some excitement at the place in which Sir Piers had stayed.

James showed some confusion. "Well, not exactly strange," said he, "quite ordinary, as you may say, but not what I could tell the like of you, miss."

A wicked house! Barbara stared all the more, until they had passed beyond the range, and then, Sir Piers by this introduced into her thoughts, she sat and revolved many things, including town, and Lady Marston, and Sir Piers himself.

The stage took her from Southampton and landed her at the Spread-Eagle in Gracechurch Street, where she was met by Lady Marston's carriage, and conveyed safely to Mayfair. Here the lady, who was kind enough to her, stayed in to await her guest, received her with gracious friendliness. All the while her eyes went over the girl, prying, estimating, and weighing chances. She had done what Sir Piers had asked of her, but had done it with no enthusiasm, and now she saw the girl she liked her task still less. The rustic was too handsome, and had too much promise in the bud, and, moreover, to the woman's shrewd observation, appeared no fool.

"She is as innocent, la, as a sheep," she said to her maid, "but she is not so stupid."

"I think she looks sly, my lady, if I may venture," said the maid.

Lady Marston considered. "Well, she may be sly," she agreed.

It had not yet occurred to her that her own reign was over; she still clutched fiercely at power. The hopes of salvation by means of the power of younger rivals

are acceptable only to intellects of the first order or to desperate souls whose fate has been printed in crude, plain colors even to their fond, deceiving eyes. Lady Marston would have scorned to think that this handsome girl might benefit her in due time. She only felt that her obligations demanded of her that she should do as Sir Piers wished. She performed her task in the while with much good nature, and with a wonderful tact. It was this combination rather than any beauty or brilliance which had advanced her socially. If it is certain that Barbara was often amazed by the acts and comments of her hostess, and almost as often shocked, it is equally true that the constant iteration of strange opinions, and the persistent exposure to a new point of view, broadened her ideas of life and morals. A month in Mayfair turned the world of the country girl topsy-turvy. She had not in her thoughts abandoned any of the principles in which she had been educated, but she was now never surprised that others held different opinions, nor indeed did their dissidence meet with her disapproval. They amused her, or it's fairer to say that they amused her as exhibited and published in Lady Marston's caustic exposition of the follies and views of her neighbors.

Lady Marston had an indifferent good nature, but never sacrificed either her interests or her spite to it. She had practiced wit, and had reached such proficiency as to be negligent in the display of it.

"That woman," she said of Lady Jersey, "would have lost her head two hundred years ago. Now she doesn't even lose her reputation." Or it might be the Prince. "His Royal Highness is highly virtuous in

one particular. He has never condescended to pay his debts by foisting his creditors on society. When his time is come let that be reckoned up in his favor." But then His Royal Highness had been uncivil enough to overlook Lady Marston for several years past. "He has a taste for foreigners and"—she glanced at Barbara—"and dairymaids. If you were a dairymaid, my dear, you could make your bow before the Prince with perfect assurance as to your future."

Barbara herself had not been deeply impressed by the Prince, whom she had seen at the play. "Why, he is fat and old," she said in surprise to Lady Marston.

"He is the Prince of Wales," said the lady, "and whatsoever age or condition of body he wishes to be."

Beside the Prince, Sir Piers, who was in attendance, showed as a master of elegance and good looks. He carried himself, by contrast with His Royal Highness, with infinite distinction. Dignity was not at the moment so characteristic of him as pliability and suavity. The Prince beamed on him and roared at his jest. He drew all eyes of the house, even when the curtain was up; for His Royal Highness made no scruple of talking and laughing at such times, if he was of that mind. Sir Piers visited Lady Marston often, and paid his *devoirs* to Miss Garraway. He was paternal and indulgent, suggested excursions, and not infrequently found time to make up a party for them. His wit and his experience matched with Lady Marston's were extremely entertaining, if they could not be called edifying. But Barbara had grown used to being amused, and accepted what came lightly. She was still intoxicated, and quite ready

to do anything which offered itself as part and parcel of modern life. In the midst of these gayeties came a letter from Mrs. Garraway, whose thoughts and ambitions were innocently revealed.

"Your Aunt Peggy has sent you another frock, my dear, which I am sending on to you. . . . It is of a black with lavender sprigs, and reckoned very much the mode, she says, in Bath. . . . Give my respects to Lady Marston, who is so kind as to have you, though I fully approve of her action and understand it. I must say she is a good friend to Sir Piers, and to you, too, my dear. Write to me as soon as you have anything to say, and commend me to Sir Piers when you see him."

Barbara folded the letter with a smile. She read her mother's mind as though it had been clearly set down in so many words. Nor was she offended. On the contrary, she enjoyed odd little feelings of satisfaction which amounted to a thrill at times.

"That was what mamma would not read," she thought. "That was why Lady Marston was chiefly concerned in asking me."

Sir Piers was expected that day, and she turned her thoughts toward his arrival with renewed pleasure. To play in the game in this intricate fashion was exciting, was almost alarming, was altogether pleasurable in the extreme. She began to wonder, as she had wondered very often before, if she had any real power over Sir Piers. He was persistent in his attentions, certainly, but he was also so profoundly cool, and so completely master of himself. She did not like that, and over again there returned to her the memory of a moment at the gate of

Moyden, and the face of one whom she had almost forgotten in these crowded hours.

Sir Piers was a pleasant companion on all occasions, and they returned to sup at Lady Marston's in an excellent temper. Barbara had enjoyed the play and the people, and she had a hearty appetite for food. She talked more than was usual with her in company, and Lady Marston glanced askew at her, and from her animated face to Sir Piers's impassive countenance, striving to read in one or the other how things stood. The girl kept her counsel, she found, more than might have been expected in one so young and inexperienced. Lady Marston gazed at her steadily. "She is a minx," she thought, and then remembered some affectionate acts of the country girl. She let her eyes roam over the white arms and the fair white neck, smooth and beautiful in texture. Her years came back to her in a revulsion; she could have used her fan viciously upon youth and bloom. "She can take care of herself," she thought angrily. "She is a match for any town-bred girl," and with a muttered excuse left the room.

The candles gleamed brightly in their sconces on the wall, and blazed in the candelabra on the table, throwing up the white of the tablecloth. Sir Piers looked across at the girl.

"Are you enjoying yourself, child?" he asked.

"In truth, Sir Piers," she answered, smiling happily, "I know not if I be on my head or my heels. I have seen so much, and Lady Marston is very kind to me."

He nodded. "Would you like to live in town?" he asked, regarding her gently.

His eyes held for her, as they had held on other occasions, a quiet authority and air of command, also a nameless fascination. She felt that she was changing color, and was irritated with herself.

"I should like it very well," she replied. "But mamma could not leave Moyden."

"I said not mamma, child," he answered. "You will marry."

"It may be so," she replied indifferently.

"You do not know," he pursued, sipping his wine, "how greatly you influence us favored townsfolk. You came upon us like a gust of good heath air. You awaken us who have gone to sleep over what we call our pleasures."

"They are pleasures to me," she said.

"They were pleasures to me when I was your age," he rejoined, "but now they are duties. If I stepped out of the round, and went to live at Hone, or in the Island, I should stop like a clock run down. So do we grow to be mechanical creatures, at the mercy of the hands or events that wind us."

"You talk as if you were old," she replied lightly, laughing.

"I am too old to change," he said, "unless I were rescued. I might be rescued."

There was an almost imperceptible pause before she answered:

"Then I must hope you will be."

"If you hope so, I shall be content," he said, and she winced under the strength of his gaze.

She rose and moved across the room, her bosom tur-

bulent with apprehension, which was not wholly disagreeable. Sir Piers also rose and followed her. He looked very handsome and uncommon, and there is no doubt he was a person of importance in the world. He took her hand.

"I am glad you are happy, child. You should stay and lighten us."

She wrestled gently with the firm fingers. "'Tis good of Lady Marston to keep me, but I have tried her patience too long. I must go back."

"Why do you suppose she keeps you?" he asked suddenly.

Barbara gave him a shy and startled glance, and cast down her eyes. "I do not know," she murmured. "She is very good." She had ceased to struggle for her hand, which he pressed gently.

"Come, Barbara, look at me," he commanded, and she obeyed him. There was, however, resistance in her face, if tremulous resistance. What she should do depended on what he might do or say. With the delicacy of his judgment, Sir Piers understood this and said nothing. He merely looked at her and sighed, not unhappily. She was warm, blushing like a rose.

"You are too pretty, Barbara. You distract me," he said at last. "I would I had never seen you."

Somehow she did not feel able to rebuke him for his bluntness, and laughed faintly instead. "Then I must go back soon," she said quite boldly. "There is another reason for going—to rid both Lady Marston and yourself of a nuisance."

He paid no heed to this, but, being now under the

goad of his passions, scarcely contained his voice. Under the mask the man was growing into giant strength and breaking the bonds of habit and principle which had confined his actions for years. He drew her to him, and she resisted.

"You must let me go, Sir Piers," she said tremulously.

"Nay," he said, with a queer, bitter smile, "'tis you that must let me go, Barbara. Let me go, I pray you. You have me tight. It is not just—a chit of a girl and an——"

"And Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone, the most exclusive buck in town," she interrupted sharply, and with a swift and vigorous motion put his arm away.

"Child, you are harsh," he said softly. "I have warned you that I could be rescued."

She made him a courtesy. "It should be a privilege to save so fine a gentleman," she said.

But indeed she was not deeply angered, but more ashamed; and in her alarm, as ever with her, was a certain thrill of pleasure. She might have withdrawn, now that she was free of his hands, but she did not, and looked at him with a provocative smile. Sir Piers gave way of a sudden to his heart.

"'Tis you, Barbara, that must save me," he said, with emotion. "By God, you shall!" and he caught her once more.

She had never seen the man emerge before; it struck her dumb with confusion and some other feeling which she did not understand. It frightened her, and she could not resist. In one moment he had gained more

advantage than he had collected in all those weeks of patience. Sir Piers, though he prided himself on knowing the heart and ways of woman, had not understood this. However much we may know or guess of women, there is always a woman beyond who lies outside that knowledge. She was taken to his breast, amazed, and at the same instant the door creaked, and Lady Marston entered.

The control of the man was characteristic and remarkable. He had given his passion the mastery, and, like a bolting horse, this was carrying him fiercely and recklessly forward. But upon the outer door of one small sense, the turning of a handle struck and arrested him in full gallop. He put her swiftly by, and his imperturbable face met Lady Marston with measured eyes as she crossed the threshold.

"I have been explaining to Miss Barbara the penalties of bachelorhood," he said. "If I were a sound married man I should go home to bed, thanking Heaven for a pleasant evening and delightful company. As it is, I must visit my Lady Peterson and play macao. Lady Marston, your humble servant."

CHAPTER XI

THE PRINCE INTERVENES

It was with intestine anger that Sir Piers parted from his hostess and called for his carriage, but he was as polite as ever. He was furious with her for her return to the rooms at that juncture, a return which, indeed, she had deliberately made. Whether it was sheer malice, born of her angry retrospect of her life, or a decent repentance that changed her mind, it is certain that she interrupted of a set purpose. Nor was she deceived by Sir Piers's coolness, having considerable knowledge of the baronet. To confirm her suspicions also, she found clear marks of agitation in Barbara. Sir Piers made his way to the macao party, and won with *insouciance*. Yet he was even less absorbed in his fortunes than usual, and his mind wandered to other matters more than once. There were handsome women about him in numbers, women of wit and women of individuality. Yet his thoughts returned to the girl from the country and lingered there. She had a charm for him, which he felt to be increasing daily. He was not at all disposed to be taken by mere freshness; there was something else that fascinated him, and he could not analyze it. He abhorred dullness, but Barbara was not exactly brilliant in fence. In fine, it was personality that contained the mysterious charm, which is to say,

of course, that the riddle was as far from solution as ever. But as he went home at a late hour he found himself questioning his opinion as to Barbara's wit. He recalled several instances of her repartee. She clearly had the makings of an expert woman of the world. And in the end his memory retained the scene in the dining room, and her unexpected retort.

"The most exclusive buck in town." Out of those pretty lips the phrase was piquant, and he confessed that she had met him in the right way. He had been upon his stilts, and she had shown him that she knew it—an audacious thing for a rustic girl with no accomplishments and less experience. "Damn my blood," cried he, "I would wager a hundred guineas she would make a figure in the town, and she shall, by Heaven!" with which resolution he was complacently content.

Barbara also went to bed late, but not with such satisfaction. No sooner was Sir Piers out of the house than Lady Marston attacked her, at first with fury, and next with philosophy. Yet the fury lasted long enough to open Barbara's eyes a little wider.

"'Tis not proper conduct," she said. "You should know better, miss. The man had your hand."

"Indeed, madam," replied Barbara, blushing, but with spirit, "if you had been present this would not have happened. I am indebted to you for your courtesy, and must thank you, and bid you farewell to-morrow."

But this cooled the jealous temper of the lady, who began to consider her position between the two.

"You would like to go home?" she asked incredulously.

"I beg, madam, you will let me make arrangements to go to-morrow," said Barbara hotly.

Lady Marston frowned. "I believe you would be best in the country," she said at last. "It is a healthy place, I'm told, and London is bad for complexions. If you wish it, you shall go, but"—she hesitated—"there's no need to hasten. Mrs. Camberley's rout is for Thursday, and there is the expedition to Richmond on Saturday."

"The country, madam, agrees best with my complexion, as you say," said Barbara, with dignity, and all unconsciously directed a glance at the lady's cheeks. Lady Marston flamed under her paint, but controlled herself. She would move no hand to save this saucy creature; let her perish.

"Well," she said lightly, "you shall get your complexion back soon enough. But I will not spare you this week."

The next day, however, to Sir Piers she showed signs of restiveness. "What is't you want?" she asked. "I have told the girl she must go home. It will be better for her health."

"By all means," responded Sir Piers, urbane once more. "By all means, my dear lady, she shall go home—if she wishes."

It appeared, however, that Barbara did not wish, and she amazingly enjoyed the river journey to Richmond. Lady Marston said no word of departure, but the girl tacitly began to assume that she must prepare, which she did, it must be confessed, with reluctance. It was some days later that she was met by her hostess late

in the afternoon, and invited to accompany her in the chaise.

"I'm going to Bland's, child," she said.

"Bland's?" said Barbara, not knowing the name.

"Yes, I must have some new perfume," said Lady Marston. "I have used all my stock, and shall need it now the season comes to an end. There is no scent like Bland's in Brighton."

Bland's was a little shop in Piccadilly, in which the fashion was wont to meet, when occasion required. A casual encounter here was often the sequel either of an ardent attachment or of a promising opening in the game of love. But of this Barbara knew nothing, and innocently tested the man's wares and cast envious eyes on the beautiful fans which he produced for Lady Marston's inspection. Some purchases having been made, they were ushered into a farther room, very modestly furnished, and quiet as the grave. Here, evidently, they were to view other goods, for Lady Marston bidding her ward wait, marched still farther in the man's company, no doubt to the inner sanctuary of his shop. Barbara waited, toying with the bottle of perfume which Lady Marston had bought for her.

She had been seated there on the sofa for some few minutes when the door opened and Sir Piers entered. He was in an amazing fine suit, very chaste of tone and simple in design, but advertising its magnificence in every line and button. Barbara half rose from her seat, being delighted at the surprise, and showed her pleasure in her vivid face.

"I heard you were here, child, and followed," he

said. "I must go with the Prince to Brighton tomorrow, and resolved to see you before I went."

"You will enjoy it, Sir Piers," she said, with her nose in the bouquet. "Half your heart is in Brighton, as you have told me."

"Ah, dear child, I have no heart," said he, with a sigh, "or, if you will have it so, 'tis all in London."

There was no doubt as to his meaning, but she ignored it. A glow of pleasure in the game of fence awoke in her, and she considered her next move.

"'Tis buried there, then, I suppose?" she asked gravely. "Lady Wilmot said that she had gone to the funeral of Sir Piers Blakiston's heart twelve years ago."

"Pooh!" answered he. "I was in my nonage, and had a funeral twice a year. Death grows more solemn as we grow older, Barbara. Did she hint for whom this poor heart died? Was it for herself? I was desperately in love with Kitty Wilmot twenty years ago. She was handsome even then."

Barbara laughed. "Fie!" she said, "'tis most uncivil of you. Lady Wilmot says very pleasant things of you."

"That would be her memory. She has a wonderful memory. She remembers to forget. There is no memory so perfect. To plunder out of the ancient past the pleasure and ignore the pain—we learn that lesson also as we grow old."

"You always talk of your age, Sir Piers," she ventured, flashing him a look. He dropped softly into the seat beside her.

"I am not young," he said in a low voice, "but I

am young enough to love. Do you think, Barbara, you could love fat fifty?"

She moved slightly from him, with a feint of spreading her skirts. "I do not admire fatness," she said, and it was upon her tongue to say, "but you are not fat." His next words seemed to answer her.

"Yet the Prince was once as slim as I. I shall turn forty very shortly."

It had been late in the afternoon when they had started from Lady Marston's house, and now the lights of the sky were dwindling. The open window on one side let in the winds of the street and the dusk. Barbara had forgotten Lady Marston, and was once more under the spell of this man.

"That's not old," she said uncertainly, and he had her hand in his. Once more she struggled against the seizure, but more faintly now than on previous occasions.

"Not too old for you, dear?" he whispered, and she could not answer. Her heart was full, but of what emotion she knew not. She had the desire, all of a sudden, to break into tears.

"Do you remember the dusk," he said, "the dusk and the storm? I shall not forget that desolate barn, a very haven for us, dear. I saw it there, black and bleak in the twilight, with the rain a sheet against the grayness, and you betwixt me and it. And there in the darkness was your hand, your hand, child." He pressed it softly.

"It is time I was gone. 'Tis growing dark," said she.

"You shall not go, dear," he answered. "I am

responsible for you, not Lady Marston. Do you know why you are here? I believe you do. Is it, do you think, that Lady Marston cares two straws about you?"

"She is very kind," gasped Barbara.

"Kind, dear, kind! What else should she be? But she is a fierce creature over her past—she is jealous. She must have looked in these pretty eyes—faith, I can scarce see them for the dusk—and bit her lips. Oh, she is kind, but she is kind for me. That is why you are here in town. For me, for me!"

His voice rose exultant, and she moved away on the couch.

"I do not understand you, sir," she said.

"You shall understand me very perfectly, child," he answered. "But you shall not go. I think you are the sweetest rose that ever I smelled. Tush, there is no need for starting. There is no one here, and none will come here. This is my kingdom, and yours, child, is here." He put his hand to his heart.

"I do not want a kingdom," she said, in a low voice.

"It shall be thrust upon you," he said swiftly. "It shall be thrust upon you; and you may not refuse it. Give me your hand, if I may not have your heart." He took it, and carried it to his lips. "Have I your heart, Barbara?"

"I like you very well," she answered, in a tumult of feelings.

"Like!" he said. "Ah, like is good, but love is better. You say I am not old, nor am I. I am in a position that many have envied, and do still envy. The

King is ill, and the Prince will be Regent again. There is no one who will stand higher than the woman I love in all the land."

"She will be greatly honored," said Barbara, struggling to rise. He held her still.

"Dear, are you deaf, are you blind? Where is she? I profess I do not know her if she be not within these four walls."

"Lady Marston is waiting, sir," said Barbara.

"Let her wait," he said, with authority. "It is her *métier*. You and I do more—we tarry. I would have you tarry, child." He drew her down as if he would kiss her, but she wrenched herself free.

"You must not, sir," she stammered.

"Lord give me patience with you, child," he answered. "Do you not love me?"

She shook her head. "I cannot tell," she said. "I think I am afraid of you."

"You must not fear me," he replied. "Yet that fear spells love. I believe you know it. Do you feel something quavering at your heart, Barbara?"

"You must not ask me," she murmured.

The confession he interpreted to his satisfaction, and caught her suddenly to his breast. "My dear, my dear," he said, "I have known your soul better than my own. I am friend to many, but kin to none. You shall have all I have. I am lonely among plenty and starving at a feast. It is in your company that I shall find consolation, and in your lips refreshment. Give me this, dear child. Oh, dear heart, let me have your lips." He was now upon the full tide of passion, and nothing

might restrain him. He drew her face to his, and she surrendered to the shock, dizzy and bewildered.

"Let me go—oh, let me go!" she whispered.

"I will never let you go," he declared. "You are mine, Barbara; you are mine, my little rural girl. See, there is much in store for us. The Prince will be King some day, and you shall be my queen. You shall stand in a great place. There is no one shall hold her head higher. Not Mrs. Fitzherbert, nor any other. We shall work our will together."

Barbara gave a faint and flattered laugh. She was well-nigh hysterical with the emotions she had allowed herself.

"But Mrs. Fitzherbert," she said, "is a most unhappy lady. 'Tis a poor omen, Sir Piers."

In the impetuosity of his passion he paid no heed to minor indications of her thoughts. "'Tis because she was a fool, dear child," he said, caressing her. She shrank maidenlike from him. "If she had not fallen into the hands of the priests, and stood out for what was impossible, she would have been happy and fortunate, the highest in the land, for all to envy—as you shall be," he added tenderly.

As if struck by a shot, she started aback, and the suddenness of the start sufficed to carry her from out of his embrace. The quick wit in her girlish mind jumped to the situation with alarm, with shame, and with a flooding indignation. She was to stand toward Sir Piers as Mrs. Fitzherbert should have stood toward the Prince.

"You speak," she said uneasily, yet controlling her voice to speak, "as if you were the Prince himself."

The man was on the wings of his triumph, and saw not nor heeded.

"Barbara, child," he said, in his exaltation, "I am prince to you, and shall be ever. Am I not better than the Prince?" he asked, with his native arrogance frank and manifest.

She rose in agitation. "Maybe, maybe," she said, her voice atremble, yet dignified. "I know not the Prince, yet I would hope that there are some not wholly base in London. But, if the Prince be so base, God help us all."

She ceased with a sob in her throat, and Sir Piers, too, had risen, and, stupefied for the first time in his life, gazed at her. In the dusk her face was visible merely as a blurred image, spreading forth wondrous beauty; her gown swayed with her sobbing; and even as he opened his mouth to speak, a door rattled, and a voice broke in upon them.

"Ho, Blakiston, so I have you at last, you fox."

The newcomer held a lamp in his hand, that shed upon the room a mellow light and illuminated the baronet, who stood between him and the girl. There was dead silence for a time, and then the intruder spoke again.

"What, are you not glad to see me? I was in the next room, and thought I heard your voice. So I seized Bland's lamp, when my business was done, and presto! Blakiston, you should be glad to see me, if only that I save you from—stand aside, man, and let me see what I save you from. I have smelled a rat, Blakiston, for long."

He was a tall, broad-faced man, with a full body and a good-humored smile; but Barbara could not see him, for Sir Piers interposed himself between them more determinedly than ever, and she was in deep shade.

"Your Royal Highness," said he, "I am delighted to see you, the more that you save me from the *ennui* of my own company and solitude."

"Solitude," echoed the Prince, with a significant laugh. "Why, 'tis a kind of solitude I know very much about. Stand aside, Blakiston. I won't have a denial."

Sir Piers's face was drawn hard, and a sinister smile began to grow about his lips. He did not move, and by an odd flash of memory, even at that moment of deep agitation and embarrassment, there recurred to Barbara's mind the scene in the barn, and the looming of the same resolute figure in the dusk between her and the intruder.

"I must ask your Royal Highness to give me leave," he said quietly but with firmness.

The Prince laughed, for he was himself excited, and in a very humorous temper. "You shall have leave, if you will give me leave," he said. "Come, Blakiston, do I ask too much? I am a little curious, and I hear you have been cheating us. Do not play the old bear. You growl like a dog with a bone. A cat may look at a king, they say."

"But the Prince shall not look at what I do not wish," said Sir Piers, with sudden sharpness.

"Say the cat, say the cat, man," said the Prince, in good-humor. "What kitten have you there? Damme, I *will* see. I *will* know what she does at Bland's."

Barbara trembled, but with indignation, with shame, and with scorn rather than with fear. She had been betrayed into this situation, and her fury embraced all who were privy to the plot. Her heart surged up against Sir Piers Blakiston, the coward; against Lady Marston, whom she vaguely recognized as a party to the treachery; and against this fat Prince, too, with his meaning eyes and his abominable insinuations. What Blakiston himself might have done or said it was impossible to say; for he had no chance for act or word. Barbara, in the full tumult of her anger, came swiftly forward into the light. Ah, she would confront these brave and generous men, confront them, even if she stabbed herself in doing so.

"It is I, Barbara Garraway, sir," she cried, in an impetuous and reckless breaking voice. "It is I who am here. Sir Piers Blakiston has just done me the honor to ask for my hand,"—and she labored with her emotion, and gasped forth, "and I have assented." She turned from the Prince to the baronet with a haughty look, that should have burned hot in his very face. The Prince started, and seemed to be taken back. Sir Piers, with a little lowering of his eyebrows, as if contemplatively, shot a glance at her.

"If this is so," began the Prince, in surprise, "I must beg——"

"It is as the lady says," broke in Sir Piers, in his civil, unemotional voice.

"I beg to be excused, Blakiston," said the Prince, and bowing toward Barbara. "I hope Miss Garraway will forgive a blunder which she will perhaps come to

understand later was natural. Blakiston, I congratulate you," and with that His Royal Highness, in no very good temper now at being made to cut a poor figure, sailed heavily out of the room.

Sir Piers turned round to his companion, but she was gone—the room was empty.

CHAPTER XII

THE SKY-BLUE CHAISE

Barbara fled in precipitation from the abominable house. It was dark when she reached the street, after groping her way through the ill-lighted shop, and although she had no definite ideas as to what she was to do, she sped into the road and began to go as fast as her feet would carry her along Bond Street and toward Mayfair. She was full of bitterness, and came now near to a collapse. If she had found any friendly soul on her way she knew, she must have burst into tears and poured forth her troubles. But she realized, as she went along past strange faces and piercing eyes, how much she was alone in London. She had no one to whom she might turn; not a creature in that wide city seemed to her in that crisis trustworthy or honest. London was a dreadful town of sins and deceptions, as she had sometimes heard, not that gay and delightful city of airy pleasures which she had dreamed. She was clad in a pretty, taking frock, and though she was cloaked, in the twilight men stopped to gaze at her, and more than one, arrested by her rapid gait, turned back and followed her for a few yards. But she rushed on, heedless, only anxious to get away from that foul place, and burning with her anger and her wretchedness. How had she been mistaken in the vile woman, Lady Marston! And how cruelly had Sir

Piers behaved! She could have wept in the street to think how he had shamed and insulted her. If this were the life of London, she did not wonder that the country folk spoke of it with such disapproval and in such bated breath. For herself, she would leave town at once, never see the treacherous Lady Marston again, pack up her things, and fly that very night. She reached the house in Mayfair at last, and, entering, sought her own room. Upon the table in the hall lay a letter, to which the man called her attention. This in the privacy of her chamber she tore open, without looking at the handwriting, confident that it was from home—that home to which every vital principle in her blood flowed. It was from Gilbert Faversham.

He wrote from "Before Flushing, 10th August 1809," and his letter, bright and valiant, yet with a little note of sadness and wonder, and even of hope also, touched her worn spirit to tender issues. She felt a longing to see Gilbert again; she marveled how she could ever have let him go, and in the sudden downfall of her world and her confidence she craved for an honest soul on whom to rest. "I will not trouble you, Barbara," he wrote, "but I have been looking for word from you, according to your promise, for many months. I must hope you are well, but I have no news. Since we sailed on the 29th of July, up till which time I looked anxiously for a letter, we have been busy in the river and very successful. The Dutchers ran before us, and here we are laid before Flushing, which we shall storm, they say, in a few days, and no doubt take. There is some say we should be better pushing on to Antwerp before

the French collect there in strength, but my Lord Chatham knows, I have no doubt; and though I expressed some such opinion to-day to Major Miles, he did not seem to think that we could do better than our present plan. If I had any wish, Barbara dear, dearer than another, 'tis that ere we go into battle here I should have a letter from you and read it. I would carry it with me in my tunic, and I am sure it would save me from my wounds. I like Major Miles, as I have told you. I suppose you have long since lost knowledge of Sir Piers Blakiston's movements. I think, maybe I was wrong, and that he is an honest man."

Barbara let the paper drop from her hand, and clinched her teeth. Honest! She seized her pen. Gilbert Faversham should know, and the whole world should know. She was overwrought to the point of hysteria, and her tears fell as she indited the letter. Poor, honest Gilbert was perhaps dying in the stricken field of Flushing, while a self-indulgent and treacherous popinjay was amusing himself in town with his foul pleasures. The contrast struck her forcibly as pitiful, as a thing for tears, and her tears ran as she wrote. She was persecuted. Gilbert should know that he had not been wrong, and that she despised and detested London and its vicious crew.

"Your letter came to me," she wrote abruptly, "in the nick of time, when I thought everyone had forsaken me. It was like balm in my poor heart, for, Gilbert, I have been dreadfully abused, and by no other than that Sir Piers Blakiston of whom you are changing your opinion. I pray you do not so. He is a villain, and

has offered me the greatest insult. I am persecuted by the wretch, and must escape him, but the wiles of London are terrible, and a poor girl is so beset. My mother (Alas that I left her, for this sojourn in town!) would weep to hear how I have been treated. I knew not men were so wicked and so evil and so cruel. I am obliged to fly from that man's importunity. I am a miserable girl. To think that anyone should dare insult me so! I would you were here to call the villain to account for his base conduct, and to protect me; but, alas! you are far away, and perhaps, dear Gilbert, lying upon a field of battle. My heart cries for you and for myself. Alas that we ever left the Forest, and gave ourselves up to such terrible risks and hazards!"

She wrote more in this strain, but here is enough to show in what a loose spirit of hysteria she had seized her pen. The wounded heart poured forth upon the paper, heedless of anything clear, and oblivious even of the house in which she was sheltered.

But she was reminded sharply of this by the entry of Lady Marston, who opened the door unbidden and approached her with a twinkling look, something between affected surprise and amusement.

"La, where did you get to?" she asked, and saw the tragic face, suffused with tears. "La, what are you in tears for, child?"

Barbara drew herself up, and with haughty agitation turned on her the vessels of her wrath and shame.

"You have exposed me deliberately to insult, madam," she said. "Heaven alone knows what hand you

had in the disgraceful plot. But this I know, that your roof is not safe for a virtuous girl."

"Hoity, toity!" declared Lady Marston, and sat down.

She was an admirable liar, and never lost her head. "So this is what I earn by my kindness—to be accused by an ungrateful girl."

"Madam," demanded Barbara, with contempt, "did you meet Sir Piers Blakiston?"

"Yes, miss, I did," retorted the other sharply, "and learned you had fled. Why did you not wait me? You had, I have no doubt, business of your own elsewhere," she ended, with a sneer.

"My business was to begone from your house," said Barbara, with a sob, "to begone out of London, where I am so deeply insulted and shamed."

"Dear me, and who insults you, pray?" asked Lady Marston, with scorn in her voice. Barbara leaped at her again:

"That man," she said, "and you were a party to it, madam. You leave me there alone, and he comes in, and grossly abuses me."

"Sir Piers!" cried Lady Marston, in accents of astonishment. "La, so that was why he looked so glum, and that's the manner of his attentions? Was he sober, child?"

Barbara nodded, for Lady Marston's attitude took her aback. She had looked for denial, but not a denial which wore such an innocent face.

"La," said the lady, "I will speak my mind to Sir Piers. He has no right to worry you so. He is growing

too confident, and thinks the whole world is under his thumb or waiting for his handkerchief. I will lecture him, the wretch."

"But, madam," protested Barbara, amazed by this tone, and anxious that all her hideous wrongs should be known and appreciated, "you cannot know how he behaved, and to what depths of villainy he descended."

"What, did he make an assault on you, child?" asked Lady Marston, with interest.

Barbara covered her face with her fingers. "Oh, no," she said, with a faint protesting cry, and stammered on in low tones. "He asked me to be his mistress."

But Lady Marston did not exhibit any horror. "La," she said, "he is too rude. He should not have approached you. I will tell him my mind."

The mildness of her reproof struck spirit into Barbara. "I suppose," she said, with bitter irony, "that I should be honored by so delicate an invitation from so notable a gentleman! I suppose I should be grateful to him for his kind condescension!"

"No," said Lady Marston bluntly, "some girls should, but not you. You are of a different quality. I will tell Sir Piers so. How came he to make such a blunder?"

To have her tragic adventure so described was more than Barbara could bear. She threw up her arms with a hopeless gesture, and sat down again. But Lady Marston was a shrewd woman, and was watching her. She proceeded in her even, pleasant voice.

"Yet after all, my dear, it will do you no harm. Of course, you may dismiss Blakiston about his business, if

you will. He deserves it. But you must remember his temptations, and many girls would have jumped at the offer. You need not have been compromised——"

"Madam—" began Barbara fiercely.

"Tut, child; do not spring on me. I can see you are not of that temper, and no one who knows you would have supposed so. I am annoyed at Blakiston. I think he must have gotten a giddy head. La, he will be expecting me to fall before him next. There are different ladders up, child, and you can take your choice. Some are dainty, like you. But I can assure you that the easiest way up is the shortest and the most comfortable. But no one can change his nature. Still, it will do you no harm. To have spurned Beau Blakiston is a feather in your cap, miss. It will advertise you."

"Madam, I do not wish to be advertised," said poor Barbara. "It is detestable. I will go back to-morrow."

"Of course you will, if you wish," said Lady Marston cheerfully. "You shall pack your things to-night, if you will. And now, child, take my advice, and set the matter out of your head. Here's supper called, and you shall go to bed early."

This seasonable and sagacious command had its effect on the girl; she obeyed her hostess quite meekly, and (if it must be confessed) slept quite soundly and without perturbing dreams. Meanwhile, the letter had gone on its journey to the "Camp before Flushing." This important fact had almost escaped Barbara's mind the next morning. If her blood was not at fever heat it was still surging and angry, and she studiously avoided all reference to Sir Piers. She refused to accompany Lady Mar-

ston to a party that had been arranged, and sat down to spend her time in reading and writing to her mother. She had not yet packed up, but was quite prepared to do so. She told herself that she must not alarm her mother, but send warning of her arrival. Moreover, as the day wore on and her book proved dull, she began to come back with some satisfaction to the idea of London. She had been greatly entertained there, and was anxious, also, of her own advancement as a woman of the world. She grew to take pleasure in the thought that she had crushed Sir Piers effectually, and wondered if Lady Marston could have behaved in a more masterly way. The same with the Prince, of whom she had said no word, recurred to her with added satisfaction. She, a poor country girl, had confounded both the high and mighty Prince and his dissolute friend. She, even on the top of these considerations, was drawn on to imagine what she would do if she ever encountered either again. From this it was an easy step to a half-veiled desire that she should come face to face with her insulter and treat him as he deserved. If Sir Piers had entered at that moment she would have taken an exquisite delight in handling him with the scorn and contempt which he had invited.

If Barbara had held her tongue about the Prince, His Royal Highness was not so reticent, and the news of Sir Piers's adventure, adroitly turned, was over the town very quickly. The story took sundry forms, most of them twisted in ridicule of a man whom all must respect, and for whom none felt any definite liking. He

had been guilty of too many offenses in his position as favorite to earn that corrupt circle's good-will. Home to Lady Marston flew the tale with emendations, and set her by the ears. Sir Piers, it seemed, had been surprised by His Royal Highness in the company of a lady, and was forced to make amends.

"He has offered the *amende honorable*, my dear," as the variation reached her; "a little rustic wench, they say."

Lady Marston, with the directness of her character, went straight to Blakiston himself and demanded the truth.

"They say you are betrothed, and admitted it in His Royal Highness's presence," she said.

Sir Piers stared impassively and even arrogantly at her. "Well," said he, with his quizzing glass in his hand, "if it were so?"—and left his question in the air.

"The girl is in my charge," she burst forth, and then controlled herself, as she observed a faint smile, which in an ordinary man and no beau would have seemed a grin, spreading on Sir Piers's face. "At least," she said, in a calmer tone, "you should tell me what you mean and what it's all about. I do not know how I stand."

"My dear lady," he said, "you stand *in loco parentis*, as you very well said."

"I cannot understand it," she pursued. "I have a tale from her of an insult, and on the other hand this story about the Prince."

"Ah, does she speak of insult?" asked Sir Piers, with interest.

"She wept tears, and had a most tragic face," she answered; and Sir Piers pondered. "She talked of going home."

"But she is not gone," he said.

"No; she is not gone," she assented.

Sir Piers smiled. "I believe," he said, "that I shall give myself the pleasure of visiting your house tomorrow, Lady Marston."

She examined him closely, and then shrugged her shoulders and turned away. But she did not dismiss the matter so lightly from her mind as this expression of indifference might suggest. Barbara still lingered in London, reluctant now to quit the scene of many pleasures and to bury herself in the dull, laborious country. She had not ventured forth to any routs or entertainments since the encounter with Sir Piers, yet she felt a strong curiosity to know what his attitude to her might be. She coquetted with the idea of meeting him on some neutral ground and of seeing his start of confusion. Yet she presently remembered that Sir Piers prided himself on the immobility of his features, and would not be likely to start.

"He is really a callous villain," she told herself, "a heartless, cold pillar of a man." But she would like to have known how he regarded herself and the situation. Indeed, she had almost made up her mind to resume her round of amusements in Lady Marston's company, when that lady returned fresh from her exchanges with Sir Piers, and full of her news.

"So you did not say the Prince was witness to your shame!" she sneered.

"I—I did not wish it to be known," stammered Barbara, flushing. "'Tis not a thing to be proud of."

"Well, the tale is over town on wings," said her ladyship consolingly, "and your name goes about coupled with Blakiston's."

Barbara gave an exclamation of dismay, and then recovered her self-possession. "I care not what vile stories they may circulate," she said proudly, "provided I have my own esteem. I am indifferent."

The sentiment was brave and admirable, and no doubt Lady Marston, out of her large experience, recognized it as familiar. Thus does all innocence cry to the world, depending on its whiteness.

"I am glad to find you take my lessons so well," said Lady Marston ironically. "I am glad you have learned wisdom. If I was you, my dear, I would be positively proud of those tales. They will enhance your value in the town, and, no doubt, bring you a better offer."

Barbara paled under the whip of this sharp tongue, but made no answer. Indeed, she had none to make.

"There is some ridiculous tale of an engagement, a solemn betrothal, la, before the Prince," went on Lady Marston, in a mocking voice. "Are you betrothed, then, to the man who insulted you?"

She had her suspicions as to the truth of the tale, which was not at all consistent with what she had gathered from the girl of her evident distress; but she was anxious to discover exactly what had happened. Her sneer provoked the answer she wanted.

"It was I who said that, not he," came in Barbara's muffled voice.

"'Twas you, was it, miss, made the match?" laughed Lady Marston. "If all girls could match themselves according to their wish, what a pretty world we should have."

"'Twas to save myself before the Prince," explained Barbara haughtily. "Sir Piers Blakiston dared not contradict me. I told His Royal Highness that Sir Piers had asked me to be his wife, and that I had consented."

"And Sir Piers—" inquired Lady Marston eagerly.

"He did not say nay. He dared not," she replied. "It was the last thread his honor hung by."

Lady Marston was silent, and recalled Blakiston's expression. She knew enough of him to expect any boldness from him, and amid all that she did not know she guessed wildly at more. She made up her mind.

"Well, you will have the chance to embrace your lover," she said sharply. "He is to come to-morrow. He has expressly told me."

"I will not see him," declared Barbara, forgetful of her previous feelings. "He dare not come here."

"If he says so, he is certain to come," said Lady Marston dryly. "I cannot hinder him, nor would I. I have no quarrel with him."

"I see, madam, I am in the way," said Barbara, in her dignity. "I thank you for your frankness. I will not trouble you after to-day."

"Nonsense, child," she answered. "Yet I believe you are right to go. You could not meet him."

"I would meet him with a stare, with not the slightest mark of recognition," declared Barbara firmly.

Lady Marston looked at her with something of con-

tempt and something of pity, too, in her eye. She was young to be so confident. "Oh, well, child," she said, "you have courage, and believe in yourself. All the same, I think you would be better at home. He will tangle you up by means of this very betrothal; he is full of wiles, and you will go tripping before you know well what you are about. Oh, never trust Blakiston. He is a snake."

"I am not afraid," said Barbara complacently.

"Yet if you was to go," pursued Lady Marston, as if she heard her not, and was reflecting, "he would look a fool. There is this tale, which His Royal Highness has spread and will chafe him with. He will be bantered, which he cannot bear. If you were here he would find some means to see you, so as to avert the banter; but you being absent, where's the lady, pray? He has been made a fool of! He would hate it; I believe it would disturb him more than anything these many years, more than that his prey escaped his hands. He is full of vanity."

This was a new idea to Barbara, who had also experienced a return of the nausea which had afflicted her that dreadful evening. She distasted the subject, and Lady Marston's warnings had a certain effect.

"Oh, I will go, madam," she said wearily, and added with a touch of petulance, "I am better for a village than town. I fear I am so simple."

Lady Marston was not of that opinion, but she said nothing. She had achieved her purpose, and it satisfied her, and she had done this without the possibility of a breach with Blakiston. He could not blame her if the

girl went after what had happened, and after her openly expressed resolution to go. Yet she was astute enough to throw suspicion off herself by writing to Sir Piers. "The girl is packed and gone," she said, "having received a letter from her mother this morning. But if you still propose to give yourself the pleasure of calling to-day, I will gladly welcome you."

This message was marked "urgent," but did not reach Sir Piers until after the stage had rolled out of the yard, and was threshing out of London down by the village of Fulham on its way across Wimbledon Common. Abruptly he ordered a chair, and was driven then and there to Lady Marston's. The interview was brief and pregnant with significance. The lady condoled with him. "The girl might not be stayed," she said. "She was in a panic."

"I understand," said Sir Piers dryly; "I am much in your debt, Lady Marston." She glanced at him anxiously. "Do you suppose any girl would have run away for that?" he asked, with a disdainful amusement. That was his idea of women. "No doubt there was something in the letter," he suggested.

"Perhaps there was," assented Lady Marston.

Sir Piers smiled blandly, and asked what time Barbara had gone. He learned that, and left the house. To Lady Marston's inquiry if he were to play at Sir James Parton's that evening, he answered in the negative.

"I am in need of country air," he said. "I keep too late hours."

His face baffled the lady, who was thrown into a fit

of conjecture as to what he meant and whither he went. As a matter of fact, Sir Piers drove straight to a well-known mews which he patronized.

An hour later a pretty sky-blue chaise with two bouncing grays was rolling westward out of town. It was a handsome equipage, for Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone invariably had an eye to appearance; and as it ran, the eyes of the passengers in the roads were drawn by it, and many a glance went after it as it sped through the villages on its way to Winchester.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WILD WATER

THE stage reached Winchester about seven in the evening. Behind the towers of the city Barbara could see from the Itchen road the sun descending in a flurry of golden clouds. The late August twilight, so wonderful and beautiful amid the green spaces of the country, was soon upon her. Yet she had quite resolved not to lie in Winchester overnight. Her maid was querulous, complained, indeed, of leaving London in such haste, and was thrown into a sour temper by her mistress's decision. But Barbara would not hear of delay. She longed now for home, and in her fancy smelled the salt breezes of the Channel. It would take but a few hours to drive to Boldre, and the moon would be up presently, lighting her upon her way. She sought the stables which the Squire had always used in Winchester, and within half an hour the chaise was ready. A little later they were climbing up the Romsey road, bound for the Forest.

The carriage ran lightly, for the horses were good and the long gloaming was pleasant after the hot glare of the day. Yet it was a tedious journey, and more than once Barbara regretted that she had not stayed in Winchester. Her maid did nothing but yawn, and thus and in other ways offer evidence of her displeasure. The postilion was the only cheerful person, for he whistled

very often as he drove, and the sound mingled agreeably with the beat of the horses' feet and Barbara's consciousness of the growing darkness. She grew sleepy presently, and the monotonous sounds of their progress lulled her. She was aware that they had pulled up at Romsey, but had nearly fallen asleep while the horses were changed. And then they were off again. The moon was now coming up through the trees behind in her fullness, and when they ran into the Forest the road lay a checker of silver light before them. But soon the shadows of the woodland deepened, a wrath lumbered up from the west and obscured the moon, and they moved in darkness, not so fast now for fear of accidents. Once more the gentle motion began to take effect upon Barbara, and she dozed. The discontented damsel also fell asleep, and mistress and maid rested amiably against one another, oblivious to the world without. The postilion had ceased to whistle, and the road wound about for Lyndhurst under the huge trees. Suddenly Barbara was awakened by a sharp noise, and at the same time the girl beside her screamed out in terror. There were voices in the night and oaths, and through all the sounds of a struggle. Barbara put her head out of the window in alarm.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" she cried.

A man's figure, burly and short, heaved out of the darkness, and a man's voice spoke gruffly. "Sorry to disturb you, miss, but business is business, and I want your jewels and your finery."

The maid set up another screaming, but was promptly stopped by the highwayman, who seized her wrist.

"If you do that again, by God, I'll break it," he said fiercely.

"Who are you?" said Barbara fearfully.

"Well, now, that's a question," said the man sardonically. "Your rattling cove's given us a bit of trouble, curse him, but he's safe now; so out with the maggs, my pretty."

"You have not killed him?" cried Barbara in terror.

"Bless you, no," declared the highwayman. "He's only under my mate's stamps on the grass here. He'll drive you on, my lady, as like as not, better than ever when we've done. Come now, out with 'em, or by the Lord I'll have to skin you myself"—he paused, and proceeded with a leer—"and when I strip, I strip, bless you."

"You shall have what I have got," said Barbara in distress, and she began to open her bags in the chaise; but at that instant the gallant postboy managed to get his mouth free from his captor's gag and called out loudly:

"Don't you go for to give 'em up, miss. I don't believe they've got a firearm between 'em, I don't," and then the admonition was swallowed up in a struggle.

The burly ruffian uttered an oath, and ran back to the assistance of his companion.

"Haven't a barber, hey?" he said. "By God, haven't we?" and upon that came a sharp report, which set the maid off again.

"They have killed him!" said Barbara, and not lacking in spirit or resolution, she sprang out of the carriage, and ran toward the spot.

"That is one," said he.

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The girl in the chaise yelled louder than ever at being deserted, and the pistol shot had started the horses plunging. The darkness was thicker, but partly by sound and partly by sight, Barbara was directed to the place where the postilion was wrestling with his captors. She would have liked to do something, but dared not in the whirl of legs and arms.

"The knife, you damned fool, the knife," she heard in the burly man's voice, and involuntarily started forward. The plunge the postboy made fetched the combatants toward her, and ere she was aware of it her slight body went down under an elbow. She fell with a tiny cry, and was conscious vaguely of something that stung. The next moment she heard a new voice, was aware that the struggle was over, and sat up in bewilderment. The postboy was getting to his feet, and breathing loud and deep; while she heard in the distance the sound of feet scurrying away. But what astonished her more than anything was the sight of Sir Piers Blakiston, on whom, as though upon an actor newly arrived upon the stage, the kindly moon was throwing now an edge of light. He stood by her side and held in his hand a pistol, which he deliberately lifted and fired. A cry came back.

"That is one," said he. "If the moon was a trifle better I should get the two. Horner, go in search of the rascals," with which he turned his attention to Barbara.

He stooped. "I hope you are not hurt, madam," he said, and then, as his hand closed on hers to help her to her feet, "Oh, Miss Garraway! Thank Heaven I was near enough to be in time. I am privileged indeed. What happy accident is this?"

He conducted her into the light of the chaise, and called out to the coachman to fetch his own lamp; then by the concentration of lights he looked at her.

"You are not injured?" he asked, and upon that uttered an exclamation, as his glance lighted on her arm. Just at the shoulder, where the soft roundness gave toward the pretty neck, the silk was shorn through, and a stain emerged.

"They have struck you, the ruffians!" he cried. "Let me see, child. I must tear it away. This screaming, witless girl is no use. Let me have your arm, Barbara," and even if she had desired to resist him, she could not have avoided the determined clutch. But she did not desire; she was weary and overborne with excitement and shock, and she experienced nothing but relief on seeing him, relief and a yearning to commit all into his hands. So when he had pushed aside the gown and examined the wound, which was but the scrape of a knife intended for the postboy, she allowed him to tie it up tenderly, and suffered him also to give instructions to her own servants as well as to his. She did not in fact listen to them, but obeyed him mechanically when he helped her to enter the chaise. Nor was she astonished or alarmed when he entered after her, and not her foolish maid."

"You are tired, child—this has upset you," he said soothingly. "You shall sleep a little. I will see that nothing happens to you."

The assurance of a strong man was comfortable, yet she murmured, "I cannot sleep. I am too broken."

"Tut, child," he said, "you shall be asleep in ten minutes."

The odd part of it was that he was right, for what with her fatigue and her mental worries, Barbara fell into a discomfortable slumber ere they reached Lyndhurst. Nor was she aware that they did not change horses there, but proceeded very fast along the Brockenhurst road. When at last she did open her eyes and called on her maid, she was terrified at the voice that answered.

"She is in the other carriage, dear child."

"Where are we?" said Barbara, startled, and struggled to put her head out of the window.

"We are very close to Boldre," he said.

She put out her hand again to the carriage door. "I must get down now," she said, with agitation. "I will go in the carriage with Martha." She turned to Sir Piers. "I have to thank you, sir, for your help," she said awkwardly; "please order that I be put down." She had just discovered that it was in his chaise that she was being driven.

"You shall be put down safely, Barbara, in time," he promised her. "I want you to rest here a little longer."

"I must ask you to put me down, sir, and let me join my chaise," said Barbara.

"Is not this a little ungrateful, child?" he asked gently. "You shall be bestowed safe and sound at Moyden. But I have something to say to you, and moreover, I could not put you down here."

She looked out at the country through which they

were moving, and the moon was full and clear overhead. All at once she sprang up with a bitter cry of dismay and despair. She had recognized the place.

"This is Beaulieu Heath," she said. "We are past Boldre."

"Only past to return, Barbara," he assured her. "I had not the heart to waken you, and I must speak with you. Come, 'twill be but for a little. I will not carry you farther."

Her breath was audible, issuing heavily, as she strove to wrench open the door, but he restrained her.

"Come, child, sit down. I will do you no harm," he said, and soothed her. But her heart was in a panic, and she would not hear. Sir Piers put her gently aside and put forth his head. She heard him calling to the postilion, and was conscious next that the chaise was swinging round. Sir Piers drew back into his seat.

"Well," said he, "have your way, Barbara. I will drive you home," and sat silent.

The turning of the carriage, the silence which seemed to admit defeat, the general persuasion of all signs that she was safe, relieved Barbara's agitation. Though her heart beat fast, she could now consider things more calmly, and in her security experienced now a faint feeling of generosity. After all, he had preserved her from the highwaymen. Yet she did not speak, and they drove on silently. The moon had once more fallen behind a bank of clouds, and was now barely visible. The chaise bumped along the road, and at last drew up suddenly before a vague settlement of waning blackness. Barbara sprang up.

"Is this Boldre?" she asked.

Sir Piers opened the door and stepped out. He went forward to the postboy and came back.

"No," said he, "but a horse has cast a shoe, and is winded. The man must rest him. And here is a place," he added, "in which, it may be, we might procure some food and refreshment in the mean time."

Barbara drew back from the shadows, where the trees rocked in the night wind. Beyond there seemed to rise the dark hulk of a house, indefinite against the sky. Somewhere out of heaven, as it appeared, flowed a constant murmur, as of trees rustling or water breaking.

"It is the Forest," said Barbara wearily. "This must be near Boldre."

She was faint and hungry, and did not again resist when Blakiston urged her forward. The house's substantiality was witness to its respectability; lights shone in the windows, and seemed respectable to the weary girl.

"They are not abed," said he, "and will give us what we need gladly, I doubt not."

It seemed he was right, for the woman who opened the door, although surprised to see them, was very civil and obliging. She was a comfortable, well-dressed person, obviously the housekeeper, and ushered them into a broad paneled chamber, lit by a hanging lamp; and there was presently before them a flagon of wine and some supper. A glass of the former revived the girl, and she began to look about her with more interest, while at the same time she grew uneasy at the presence of her companion. She awoke to the significance of bare facts

again, and from her state of torpor passed speedily into a condition of alarm.

"The chaise must be ready now," she said.

Sir Piers took a draft of wine, and regarded her with assurance. "Very soon," he said, "very soon, child."

Barbara's glance went round the room, noting the furniture and the silver on the walls. She had vaguely imagined this to be an inn, but, of a sudden, she became conscious that it was nothing of the sort.

"What place is this?" she cried, in increased alarm.

Sir Piers set down his glass; the blood ran warmly through his body. "Faith, my dear child," he said pleasantly, "you should know better than I, being a resident in these parts."

"What house is this?" she repeated in her agitation, and there was in her voice a certain note also of command.

"A house upon the road—a wayside hostelry," he answered.

"'Tis nothing of the kind," she cried, pointing with her hand at the walls. "This is no country tavern's wall. 'Tis not an inn. What is it, and where is it? I bid you tell me," and she held to the ingle nook with one trembling hand, while her eyes, flashing fear and anger, were directed on him.

He appeared to hesitate, and she ran across the room toward the bell. "I will call the woman. I will know. I will ask her if the chaise is ready. I will ask her to take care of me. She shall give me her protection," she cried, ending with a sob.

Sir Piers put himself swiftly in her path. "Stay, Barbara," he said, "you shall not do that. Be not foolish, and listen to me. I will tell you where you are. This is Sir Thomas Rankin's house."

She gazed at him, arrested midway, as if she had not heard, and then said faintly:

"Sir Thomas Rankin's house by Beaulieu?"

"Even so," assented Sir Piers.

Back upon her came a recollection, a transient scene in her journey to London, which now seemed so very far away. Was it not the postilion who was pointing out a wicked house, and had she not shuddered? She broke into a cry.

"Then 'tis yours," she cried. "'Tis your house!"

Sir Piers bowed. "Where you are sincerely welcome as an honored guest," he said gravely, and then, moved at once by the blank tragedy of her face and his own internal passion, he put out a hand appealingly to her. "I love you, Barbara, I love you!" he said, his musical voice vibrant with emotion; and the flood, long pent and dammed by artificial repression, carried all before its mighty volume. He stooped to her, with his arms open.

"Barbara!" he cried, "Barbara!"

But her terrible face of stone changed quickly to one of passionate and living fear, and with a choking cry she opened the door behind her and ran from the room.

It was not the door by which she had entered, but in her blind despair she heeded not, nor was aware of this. The passage in which she had entered sloped downward apparently, and upon the farther side gave access to

another room. It was in darkness, save for what light struggled out of the declining moon under her range of clouds. But she ran on, hearing behind her a voice that called "Barbara! Barbara!" and by the aid of that same faint moonlight she descried another door, which she managed to unbolt and fling open ere the footsteps which pursued her were clear of the passage. The next moment she was under the vault of heaven and in the friendly air of the night. She plunged across a little lawn, and ran into the bushes of a shrubbery. Where was she? If she could reach the chaise! But "Barbara! Barbara!" wailing on the night wind to her set her off again in a panic. She slipped through the shrubbery, and came out on a gravel path. It went downward, and down she went at her highest speed, with one desire only—to get away from that house and the abandoned man who called and pursued her.

The path ran between the hedges, and the facts that she was confined between its straight limits and could not deviate to one side or the other added to the precipitance of her flight; for at any moment she might hear his feet behind her. By speed alone might she outstrip the satyr and find safety. The path curved and twisted, but the light was still strong enough to go by. It ran now between high banks, and the murmur on the air which she had noticed on arrival at the house had swelled louder. It came up in a broad wave of sound to her ears, and in another instant she had turned an elbow, the hedges ceased, and before her lay the waters of the creek rolling at high tide. Even as she paused, uncertain now as to her course, she caught the noise of her pursuer, and

winged again with the lightness of the hart, flew to the water's edge. A boat swung against a tiny jetty, chafing the woodwork with the pulsation of the tide, and the water rose and fell underneath it with a guttering sound. With her mind concentrated full on her own fears, and recking of nothing else, Barbara leaped into this, and cast off from the jetty. The boat jerked out upon the face of the creek. She was safe.

She stood in midstream and looked toward the shore, where she could descry the tall figure that stood by the jetty. He advanced down to the edge and peered out into the stream.

"Barbara, child, come back, for God's sake!"

The boat, caught in a flow of water, spun round softly, and began to lurch downstream. The tide was on the turn, and hummed under the thwarts. Barbara felt herself gliding slowly away from the jetty, away from the house, away from the hateful man who had been the source and fount of all her miseries. She sat down in the stern of the boat, and took the tiller. She was not afraid at all now, for she knew how to work a boat; but as her peril passed, she began to face the problem which awaited her, and which was of growing and formidable proportions. How was she to get home?

It would be possible, of course, to run the boat ashore farther down the creek, but that would land her in a region far remote from Boldre, and in the darkness she doubted if she would be able to find her way back. Moreover, the hour was late (it must have been midnight), and she shrank from the thought of the wild and desolate heath at the dead of night. Again, she

might fall into the hands of Sir Piers Blakiston's mercenaries, if perchance he had dispatched any in search of her. She saw that it would be impossible to run ashore. There remained but one alternative, and that was to steer out into the Solent, and creep round under the wind to Lymington. She calculated that with the strengthening breeze she might cover the distance in little more than an hour. It was her only chance, and being a spirited girl, she made her decision at once. She fixed her little sail forward, and trimmed her craft, which now started away at a brisk pace down the creek.

The night was darkening now that the moon had disappeared, but she could make out the mass of the banks on each hand, as the full tide drew between them toward the sea. She held her course as near as was possible in midstream, and sat, listening to the breaking of the water against the boat, not without some triumphing thrills at her heart. The odor of nocturnal fields, a sense of the earth, blew off the low-lying land and filled her nostrils, as it had been some perfume. She was quite content, for she had escaped, and already the breath of the open Channel was on her face, inviting her, enticing her, leading her to strange issues. The mystery, the loneliness, and the profundity of the waste and illimitable space toward which she was drawing worked in her soul and influenced her. There is in all, at least of the people of this embosomed island, some latent affinity with the sea. The savor of it is in our blood even when we are unconscious of it; and unexpectedly, the affinity which we know perhaps as a sense of romance in home-keepers or a mere desire of wandering in the restless mariner,

erects itself in some formidable and astonishing passion. Not altogether vainly cries the ocean in our English ears by English cliffs. So in Barbara's heart awoke that native and hitherto unsuspected wildness. She had the rudder in her hand, and smelled the sea from afar. That little land-locked creek was emptying itself into the broader Solent, the Solent rolled by the Needles into the tumbling Channel, and deep beyond deep of the great Atlantic was calling to the English seas. Combined channel, sea, and ocean were all in flow together, moving under the same law, and in that union a majestic self-revelation of that mighty force which controls the world. While the earth slumbered, and smelled faintly of garnered cups and sweet hay and the first-turned sod, the waters of the earth were active; they thrashed day and night from pole to pole, and put a girdle round the globe. The sea, surely, was the true manifestation of the unknown, in its might, in its majesty, in its ceaseless and terrifying motion. A welter of thoughts passed through Barbara's head; her forefathers awoke in her, and as she began to hear the voice of the Solent she drew a deep breath of satisfaction. The mouth of the creek opened wider, and the little boat, leaping the bigger waves, plunged and dipped as she swung out into the moving plain of water.

Behind her Barbara heard the noise of a pursuing billow which fell in a cataract under the gunwale with a swishing, sweeping sound as it might be the last effort of the creek to shove forth the boat upon a more adventurous voyage. She was now afloat upon the wide sheet between the mainland and the Island, and even as she

recognized it the wind whistled sharply against the sail, the low banks faded from sight, melting into soft and deliberate darkness, and she was alone upon a desolate reach of water without light or mark within view. It was clear that she must hug the shore and go by careful bounds into Lymington. The moon was clean gone from the sky now, and it astonished her to notice how great a blackness had fallen. Westward over the fringes of the land lurked a faint glow, visible only upon the water as a mist of light, which was yet not illuminative. A gray road opened for her, in its descending track of the moon, a dim pathway westward, over which the skiff began to go in leaps and rushes, rocking in the broken water of the Channel. Yet even that gray seam of pathway was acceptable; the blackness on either side loomed on her, and was terrifying even through the thrill of romance. If she went on as she was going, and under the brisk breeze, she should be in Lymington by one o'clock. And indeed, it now appeared that she might go faster, for the wind, which had blown almost abeam, now shifted abaft and strengthened. The tiny boat put her nose down and drank the green seas as she galloped. Barbara exulted to watch it. It looked as if every moment she would slide fathoms deep into the bubbling water, and when she breasted and rose, the sensation was to Barbara as to a child that rises in a swing or triumphs on a seesaw. She came to watch the dipping and climbing of the craft with fascination; and all the time in her rear the muttering wind grew apace. Heaven loomed above her now, big with clouds, and the air was cold. Somewhere, not very far away, the dawn was rising to the edge of the

eastern horizon, but all was still darkness here, that chill darkness that precedes the coming of the sun.

The gray path went out as if it had been a candle that expired, and Barbara gave a cry of alarm. Where was she? The shore lay somewhere on her right, and she had been running on a port tack; therefore she must put over and go in lest she get out to sea. Round went the rudder, and about went the boat in a bluff gust of wind. It came in capfuls, but with an ever-growing vigor. Barbara peered ahead, seeking for the land on which she must not rush, and presently, thinking she descried in the gloom the outlines of a promontory, put round the tiller once more, and sheered out upon the bosom of the Solent. But now the wind came down in ferocity. Blackness lay on all sides of her, and the boat dipped and rose and rose and dipped again. She took the water, and lifted her beak, scattering a shower of spray, so that the girl was drenched over and over again. Behind thundered the gale into which the wind had mounted so treacherously.

"I must go on the other tack," said Barbara; "we are too far out," and she jammed back the tiller. The nose came about in a flurry of foam, and the next moment half a sea was over the side. The spray blinded her, and the noises of the water and wind roared in her ears, confusing her. Her fingers clinched mechanically upon the tiller, and when the gust passed, the boat was running freely but in what direction Barbara knew not. How far had she got? Must she not turn now and run into Lymington? She strained her eyes in endeavoring to pierce the darkness, but no lights were visible any-

where upon the tumultuous and heaving sea. The wind now broke and ravaged the strait, till the surface of the Solent fell into troughs and mounted into hillocks. She climbed the one and descended into the other, and there were times when the walls of water intensified the deepness of the night. Not a star gleamed in heaven, which was full of wracks that seemed only part of the wildness on which she was riding to what she interpreted now as her doom. The thrill was gone long since, and in its place grew up a cold and numbing terror. To perish there, an outcast on the face of those ruthless waters, seemed so cheerless a fate, so forbidding and terrible an end. She had given up hope now of finding any refuge, yet when on the crest of the waves dispatched her gaze desperately about her. There was no light, and there was no sound save the roaring of the gale and the breaking and drumming of the water.

Barbara was not aware how long she fled before the savage wind, but was presently surprised to come to the full flow of her thoughts once more and to realize that she was still afloat. Her senses were dumfounded by the tumult, but she still involuntarily clung to the tiller, and the little boat gallantly fought through surge and through billow, shipping water and groaning and tossing for all the world like some high-spirited animal that is being ridden to death and puts a brave face on it.

She was conscious now that a change was spreading reluctantly over the water; the dawn was advancing with slow feet, and throwing before it signs of its arrival. The blackness grew diffuse, and gradually melted; the

sea was wan and gloomy, a grisly stretch of waste and weather before her; the air grew colder, and her hands were numb on the tiller. And now, by the ironic turn of fortune, far away upon her right gleamed a light that twinkled and went out and twinkled forth again. It shone, no doubt, from the bows of a ship that went down the Channel, or even, maybe, hung in the rigging of a packet coming to the Island. Was she off Yarmouth now? Her heart throbbed with hope as the thought flashed through her that this indeed might mean rescue and safety, and an early return to the Hampshire coast. But there it sank into despair, for she calculated that by this hour, and flying before such a wind, she should be farther away, through the gates of the Solent possibly, and, it might be, breasting even the larger tides and currents of the English Channel.

The light upon her beam increased in brightness, and again her heart answered to the hope. Was it the Yarmouth packet? She would have given much to put round the boat and turn to meet this stranger, but she feared the welter of the sea, realizing now that her only chance was to run as she was running athwart the swell, and that to lay so small a craft broadside to the direction of the water would be to swamp her forthwith. Yet with a wonderful rising of her breast she noticed how gradually the light rode nearer. Was it a fisher boat that was tramping to its favorite grounds? Or was it, perchance, a King's sloop cruising for the free traders? Whatever it might be, it spelled rescue for her, and she was feverish with anxiety that the day should break and discover her to those aboard the boat, or that they should

come near enough for hailing. As she gazed, she was aware of a change in the course of her own boat; the nose had gone to port even in the teeth of her rudder; currents and tides unknown were stealing her from her just direction. Yet what mattered that, since one course was as indifferent as another, provided only she kept afloat. The skiff danced and shot forward into the open grayness; there was below the keel a noise of rending, groaning waters; the green waters swarmed over the frail bulwarks. She staggered and checked under the weight of the avalanche, and then leaped out again under the spur of tide and wind. Of a sudden the timber quivered and cracked below the boat, she rolled half under, and then with a long and tearing shriek she slipped away into deep water, and righted. The point of a rock had taken her in her giddy course, and now the sea came in through the rent in spurts. As this terrible fact became clear to Barbara, helpless in the stern, the immeasurable black mass of clouds shifted from the east, and through the vault the banners of the dawn streamed up the sky. She uttered a still, small cry, which was, indeed, but a sob. Before her towered the broken heights of the Needles, jagged with their thousand pinnacles, and encircled by flocks of screaming gulls. The little shell of a boat, battered and water-logged, and now beyond any control, jumped toward these forbidding sentinels, as if anxious to founder and be done with its troubles. And Barbara herself, after the first burst of terror, resigned herself mutely to death. The boat ran toward the rocks, as toward the teeth of a saw, but in that moment she was aware of a voice above the wind and above the crying

of the gulls, above even the noise of the waters on the cliff.

"Put your tiller to starboard, starboard!" it cried.

Mechanically she obeyed, as well as her numbed hands would allow her, and the boat turned and came up toward the wind, escaping the ugly rocks, but lying flat now in the beat of the wild water. She was conscious that she could keep afloat but a minute or two longer; she must go down in that whirlpool forthwith. But even as she thought so she saw the slim black nose of a boat emerge out of the gloom, and with a deep, low, rushing noise, amid spray and foam, the hull of a cutter loomed up and threatened her. The boat bumped like an egg against the larger vessel, and then dipping toward the bows, gently sank. The next moment Barbara felt herself in the grip of strong arms, and a second later knew nothing at all.

When she opened her eyes, it was upon a sky still black with the marks of the storm. The dawn tarried, but the white heads of the breakers in the coves glistened and faded perpetually. The coast by which the cutter sailed was rugged and inhospitable, the cliffs were thick with seabirds, and far off the shores of the Island southward were merged in darkness. She noticed this dimly from where she lay amidships, upon a pile of canvas, and then, memory recurring to her awakened brain, sat up and looked about her. The first thing her gaze alighted on was Sir Piers Blakiston, with his coat off, hatless, and pulling at a sheet. He drew the rope into a knot, and cried an order to the seaman at the tiller, and

in moving his eyes thus, saw her. Instantly he came forward.

"I am so glad to see you recovered, Miss Garraway," he said pleasantly. "You must drink a lot of eau-de-vie, or I will not answer for your wetness." So saying, he took from his pocket a flask, and poured forth into the cup a little spirit. "There is always one thing for which you can depend upon me, child," he said, in his well-remembered and amiable voice, "I always carry good brandy. Yet we will not ask whence it comes. Perhaps," he waved his arm, "the gentlemen on these shores may know."

She took the brandy without question, being too greatly exhausted to refuse; and her blood stirred, and began to flow within her more briskly. The wheels of being began to whir, and the immediate effect of this was that, whereas the sight of Sir Piers on her return to consciousness had not even surprised her, she now exhibited her consciousness in her expression, and felt in her heart the creeping of alarm. But Sir Piers proceeded equably, seating himself by her. He might have been at a London rout for the polish of his manner and the ease of his carriage. The sea was breaking savagely, and he was himself very white of face and disheveled, but he showed no signs of discomposure in his talk.

"'Tis lucky, child, I picked you up," he said. "You were breaking on the Needles, and if it had not been for honest John Garth here, which, I believe, is his name, you would be under sea and afloat with mermaids now. Child, what a perilous, reckless journey! You should not have dared adventure. It has made even me quite

sick. My stomach is more than uneasy. I detest the sea, Barbara. Let me give you some more eau-de-vie. Tut, child, it will not hurt. It is physic in your condition. Do you remember the wet clothes, and you and me in the storm together that night? My dear, I little thought we should undergo a more dangerous experience together."

"A more dangerous! You say truly," said Barbara bitterly. She drank off the brandy recklessly, and gave him back the cup. The fire ran in her veins.

"Well, well," he said kindly, "that will keep you secure from chills. You are soaked." He laid his hand on her bosom. "Poor heart, poor heart, it beats too hard!"

"It should beat soft in bed at Moyden," cried poor Barbara, weeping.

"Child, it shall beat soft abed in safety within an hour, upon my soul, I swear it," he declared, being strangely moved, and he left her and went aft to the fisherman.

The cutter made a turn now and drew inshore upon the other board. Already Barbara could hear the tide upon the beach, and already the houses and trees upon the superior heights of the Island were discernible and distinguishable. Moving in still waters now, the cutter rocked but gently, and rising and falling on the swell crept point by point to land.

The boatman ran on the sandy shore of a little cove, and Sir Piers assisted the girl out of the cutter. He had replaced his hat and stock and coat, and the color was back in his face. He talked with even friendliness.

"This is no desert island, they tell me, but a place within the King's writ. The people hereabouts live on wreckage and contraband, I am assured, but not on shipwrecked people. Let me have your arm, child. That is well; you are far too weak to walk, but there is only a few hundred yards. The village lies there, and I think you shall be housed here in comfort. You must be dog-tired—well, you shall sleep like a cat." So saying, he led her along the rising ground to where the hamlet lay still wrapped in its sleep. Upon the margin of the village stood a long and rambling house, venerable in look and crazy in condition. It was built in an Elizabethan pattern, but had received alterations unwillingly, and to one side rose a square and ugly tower imposed upon the building by the Palladian Philistinism of a later age. The whole was set aback from the road, in ample grounds and amid umbrageous trees. To this house Sir Piers conducted the girl, who was, after some ringing of bells and explanations, admitted presently by an old woman with a bunch of keys at her girdle. Barbara had scarce questioned the introduction, even in her own mind, and she was too weary to dream of objection. Thus in a little she was, as Sir Piers had promised her, abed in a strange and spacious chamber, which smelled of sweet linen and savored by the sea; and hardly was she there before she was fast asleep, and dead even to dreams.

CHAPTER XIV

IN DAXTER HALL

Sir Piers had traveled down from London in a maze of conflicting desires. He had thought to pluck the violet in her rural seclusion, and lo, he found himself face to face with the rose. He had no belief in the instinctive virtue of woman. It was to him an affair only of persuasion, of price, of vanity, or of ambition; and some women were so dexterous and so capable as to make bargains which were highly advantageous. Of these were such as became duchesses, or married into the moneyed stock of the country. Others, less skillful, occupied places of less honor; but in each case it was but a game in which the sexes were pitted against one another, each with its own desires, aims, and ideals. Sir Piers's ideal was freedom, but he loved a beautiful face, and he had also the man-of-the-world's taste for novelty. The town beauties were too much to a pattern to satisfy a fastidious mind. Their very exclamations and conversational retorts were copies from a well-worn block. Yet rustic innocence had no power to move him, and had Barbara been merely a country beauty he would have abandoned her with a pat on the head to the country lover. But she answered to more in him, and appealed to more. He detected latent qualities which attracted him—wit, audacity, and the nameless something which makes for

love and defies analysis. He would fain, as has been said, have plucked the violet, and here was the rose. Barbara had altered to his mind very much during those few days which preceded her flight. She was not the modest flower which he had thought, she was fuller blown, fuller grown. He recalled, as he rolled through Hampshire, the amazing spirit with which she had risen on him at Bland's. There was the Prince, whom she knew for the Prince, and, instead of ceding to tears or shrinking with the shame of the position, she had boldly claimed what he had never promised.

"Sir Piers Blakiston has just done me the honor to ask for my hand, and I have assented."

The courage was significant, her bearing had been regal, and (what tickled him vastly) the adroitness had involved him in embarrassment. Was this the handsome girl whom he had thought to educate at his will? "Brava!" he cried to himself in the privacy of his carriage. "Damn my blood, she had me fair and square, the vixen!"

It pleased him to reflect upon his discomfiture, for it was long since he had suffered a rout at the hands of the sex. He had found Lady Marston difficult and tricky, and others of her character, but in the end he had brought them to terms. Could he reduce this wild innocent girl to the same servitude, or would she defy him? By the time that he so unexpectedly came upon the party with the gypsies he had almost made up his mind that she would continue to defy him, and that the pursuit of victory was not worth the terrible pains. He wavered, indeed, in his courses, and, being deeply in love

now, returned to a manlier and simpler idea. He ventured to believe in Barbara's love for him—for, to say the truth, the man could not doubt that any woman would give her preference elsewhere. And believing in that affection, he contemplated the abandonment of his illegitimate designs. This seemed to be an occasion when a duchess exacted terms and got them, and he would not grumble if he should be defeated in the battle of sex which he had inaugurated now for many weeks. Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone was a philosopher, and was differentiated from other beaux and dandies in this, that he never carried on a pose in the teeth of common sense, and never disputed facts with fate. The affectation was a means to an end with him, an advertisement before the world, a valuable asset—but only so long as it was really so. He would have wiped the whole trick out at a stroke if his practical interests had required it. As it was, his interests jumped with his profession of exquisite, and he remained the foremost buck in town. The grave question for him *en route* for Beaulieu was whether he should continue to remain so.

He watched the girl as she dozed in the chaise, and the sense of her weakness and her physical frailty, as well as a conviction of her inferiority of will, awoke in him. After all, was such as this—this pretty creature in her pretty frock, travel-weary and forlorn, and fain to rest in her sleep her fair head on his shoulder—was such as this likely to gainsay him to the end? It did not seem possible. He stroked the delicate head with a gentle hand, and the sleeper sighed—it seemed a sigh of content, of resignation, of peace. Sir Piers contemplated

the outlook with new eyes, and swerved again. His orders had been given to the postilions, and he had set the maid's mind at ease by methods of his own. But on the way to Brockenhurst he came to another resolution. Barbara slept, and they ran past Boldre, and when she awoke it was too late, and he was committed to the cruel adventure.

When Barbara had disappeared into the darkened garden, Sir Piers had followed precipitately. By this time he was on the wings of a very ardent spirit, and nothing could restrain him. He ran down the rocky pathway which led to the shores of the creek, and when he reached the jetty it was to descry dimly in the twilight the boat rocking on the tide, and a slim white figure in the stern. He called to her, but in vain, and slowly the boat melted into the darkness. His cries, however, brought to his side a fisherman who was a tenant on the estate, and to him Sir Piers explained as much of the situation as was necessary. The fisherman had a boat at a landing near by, and for a consideration his boat and services were at the gentleman's disposition.

"I want you to put out and follow a boat that goes down with the tide," said Sir Piers. "I have no doubt she will beach a little lower, but we must watch closely. Make haste, man, or you will be too late."

The man, Garth, needed no other incentive than the gold pushed into his palm, and in the twinkling of an eye the pursuer was afloat, and galloping down the creek under a larger press of canvas than Barbara's poor little boat carried. Yet the start had given the skiff the advantage, and the cutter ran out of the heads into

the Solent in the rear of her prey. From this time onward Sir Piers struggled and fought with chance, which in the end, as we have seen, was induced to favor him. He had come to the conclusion, by questioning the fisherman, that Barbara must have decided to make for Lymington, though he wondered at her courage and resolution. Toward Lymington, therefore, the other's nose was laid. She took two strides to the smaller cutter's one, and would, no doubt, have overhauled her ere half the distance had been covered, if Barbara had not lost her bearings. As it was, off Lymington River Sir Piers hailed a craft that lay at anchor, but was now picking up her cables preparatory to seeking the shelter of the interior waters. He got no news of the skiff, and turned about, despite the protests of the fisherman, who now found himself committed to a bigger venture than he had anticipated. Sir Piers himself knew less of the sea and sea craft than of anything else, but he did not hesitate where the experienced sailor shrank and murmured. The night had fallen black, and the wind was gathering out of the north. The cutter put out to creep back upon her course, and pick up if possible the mark they had overshot, and presently after was fighting the gale even as Barbara had fought it. Here, as has been indicated, chance tipped the balance in Sir Piers's favor. The cutter ran hard down Channel, scurrying before the blast, and Sir Piers sat in the bows, drenched, sick at heart and heavy with forebodings.

"Let her run," he had said, when Garth was wrestling with the tide. "Let her run."

It was the easiest thing to do, but Sir Piers was

moved by other considerations in issuing his command. Barbara, poor child, must be flying somewhere out on the waste of waters before this gale, if she was not already engulfed fathoms deep. The strong man shuddered, and communed with his own soul. He had driven her forth, he had killed her; that tender and delicate body tossed in the swell of the tide, and rose and fell among the drifting seaweed. "Let her run," he said, and the cutter, even under the furled sails on which the prudence of the owner insisted, raced through the broken water.

"Yonder's Yarmouth," said Garth, making a motion to put the helm over and turn in; but the madman he had taken on his back stopped him with authority.

"Let her run, I say," and with a shrug of his shoulders the man obeyed. After all, the *Rose* would ride out this storm and another to boot, and if the gentleman wanted a wet night he should pay for it.

It would have been impossible even for so critical a man as Sir Piers to argue from his sensations when chance had done its best, and Barbara lay unconscious in the cutter. The heart beat, and a faint stirring of breath came and went between her lips; the fair hair fell loose to the wind, and the dainty dress dripped with the sea water and was fouled with stains. Yet Sir Piers, after that first quick scrutiny which reassured him that she lived, stood quite passive, hatless and coatless, looking down with some perplexity at the silent form of the girl he had chased by sea and by land for nearly four-and-twenty hours. The whiteness of her face alarmed him; the pretty color was gone; she lay reft of all the

graces with which life and taste and character invested her. Yet at that moment he experienced a greater, a surer attraction than ever before. Within that soaked and draggled garment, and under the secluding mask of that ugly swoon, were the delicate flesh and the mind and spirit he loved. He bent and drew his coat about her, and from a pocket produced the familiar flask of eau-de-vie. As the blood resumed its proper sway within the slim body, and showed visibly on its round in the marble face, he nodded, his lips compressed severely.

"I will have her right yet. She shall go to Daxter; she shall rest there."

Thus it happened that Barbara was sleeping peacefully in Daxter Hall, which, by the grace of a distant cousin, had passed recently into the hands of Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone.

But it was not until late in the afternoon, when she awoke, that Barbara began to question her surroundings. Her limbs ached, her flesh was weary, and the bed of down was soft and grateful to the senses. Yet, despite the inertia natural to her condition, she busied herself with conjectures, with efforts of memory and with fears. She recalled the rescue in the nick of time by the cutter; she remembered waking to find Sir Piers's face, a kindly face, bent over her; and she had walked with him to this house from the beach. Where was she? The recollection of that house by the creek came back to her with a flash of horror. She looked out of the window, almost in the dread that she would see the funereal trees before the door and hear the voice of the creek.

What she saw was an avenue of limes stretching to the sky, and beyond the blue sea thundering on the cliffs of Freshwater. Her gaze passed in review the lovely ocean, and lost itself on the far horizon. The red sail of a fishing boat stood out for the west, and southward was the long curve of the coast to Blackgang. It was a goodly prospect, and one which was unfamiliar to her. She was on the coast, it appeared, but she could recall no scene like this in the neighborhood of Lymington, or Christchurch, or Southampton. Then it dawned upon her confused senses that she must be in the Island. In whose house, then? It was a large mansion with an air of consequence. Her clothes, neatly folded and dry, were lying near. She dressed herself in a fear of wonder and suspicion; but almost ere she had finished a knock fell on the door of her chamber, and a maid servant entered, bearing a tray on which were several choice dishes and a small bottle of wine.

"You must be hungry, miss," said the girl. "Mrs. Hobday sent you this."

Barbara realized at once how hungry she was. She thanked the maid and said:

"Please convey my thanks to Mrs. Hobday. I will do myself the pleasure of thanking her in person when I see her."

The girl had the air of inquisitiveness; she eyed Barbara with interest, and lingered. "It is a pretty prospect from these windows," went on Barbara, out of civility. She was quite at her ease now that she had learned the name of her hostess. "What do you call this fine house?"

"'Tis Daxter Hall, miss," replied the maid, and looked at her with more interest than ever.

"And you have a master as well as a mistress?" pursued Barbara, with the reluctance of one gently bred to push inquiry, yet with the object of making conversation. She had seated herself at a small and handsome *bombé* table near the window, and was beginning her meal.

The handmaid stared, and emitted a little giggle. She was of a comely dark type common to the Island. "For sure, miss, yes," she said, in tones of wonder.

"I am deeply indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Hobday," continued Barbara, with prim formality, "for their hospitality."

The maid's eyes grew larger, and an empty smile spread on her face. "Mr. Hobday!" she said. "There's been no Mr. Hobday for years. Mrs. Hobday's a widow."

"But you said you had a master," said Barbara, stopping in her meal.

"For sure, Sir Piers is master," responded the wench. "But he's little at Daxter, and it's not much master we've seen since old master died."

Barbara's knife and fork rattled on her plate, where she laid them in her start of emotion. She glanced out of the window, and there was the avenue of limes streaming and tossing in the wind, while away in the distance roared the blue of the inconstant and continual sea. Of a sudden the old panic leaped in her side, and her appetite was gone. She gazed vacantly at the tray and its dishes.

"Would you like anything further, miss?"

The voice roused her. "No, thank you," she answered, in a dull, monotonous tone, and it was only the click of the latch that awoke her wits from their frightened and bewildered lethargy. She got to her feet, and looked wildly about the room. This was Sir Piers's house. She who had sailed on that desperate venture to escape him, had once more fallen into the trap, and once more was at bay—a timid, delicate spirit of fire and resolution. At bay! No, there was yet a chance—the door was open for her still, as it had been open by Beaulieu; only that now she had no boat, and a neck of the sea stretched between her and safety. She knew Yarmouth, and if she could reach that place, she could surely meet with some opportunity of crossing the Solent. At least she would make the effort, once more fly as Daphne fled Apollo, seeking some refuge for her fears, some cover for her shame. There must be, in the last emergency, some kind and faithful household on this island, in which she might confide, and which she might charge with the custody of herself and her honor. This settled sharply in her mind, she came down to practical issues, stilling with all her might the agitation of her heart. She was in need of food, and resumed her meal, pouring forth a glass of the rich wine for which the cellars of Daxter had been explored at Sir Piers's command. She had slept, and now she had eaten she was a new woman, and she felt that she could cope with her enemies, even with the archenemy himself.

She had already donned what remained to her of her cloak and hat when, struck by a fancy, she paused and

went to the huge oak wardrobe at the foot of the room. She opened it and explored deep into its recesses. Here was a lumber of things, for the most part pieces of silk and linen, laces and muslins, such as had, in times past, no doubt, clothed the bodies of that race and house. The owners, it might be generations of owners, were dead long since; the fair women slept in the dust to which they were cognate, but here was that which had decked them forth, sweet smelling of lavender, scarce touched of time, and dainty still and handsome to all the senses. Barbara turned over these treasures rapidly, until she found what would serve her purpose; whereupon she cast off her cloak and threw on a black mantle with a hood of blue which came low upon her brow, and disguised the shape of her face. Equipped with these new defenses, she opened the door of the bedroom, and emerged into the corridor.

She had slept long, and the sun was failing; a beautiful coolness was in the air, and the light was soft and benignant, no longer hot and glaring. There was no one visible, and no sound reached her from any part of the house. She stepped softly along the corridor toward what she gathered must be the front of the house that faced the sea. It had never occurred to her for one moment to question Sir Piers's intention, nor had she dreamed of throwing herself on his pity. There was no hope, she knew by instinct, of touching so relentless and so persistent a foe. Her only chance was to escape, and the sooner she was out of Daxter the better would be her prospect of ultimate success. The corridor turned at right angles, and brought her out into a spacious landing, from which on two sides a massive stairway sloped

in a curve to the hall below. Voices arrested her; she caught a glimpse of the housekeeper with the keys, and one of the voices was a man's. She shrank back into her corridor. This might be Blakiston himself; and swiftly she returned upon her tracks, resolved to try what fortune might bring her at the other end. Toward the back the corridor narrowed to a passage devoid of all dignity, and more than once she passed the foot of little staircases that ran up into a higher floor. At last her path terminated, and mean and winding stairs led downward. Should she venture? And what was below? She seized upon her courage almost blindly and began to descend, her heart throbbing, her face muffled in her hood.

The stair corkscrewed sharply, and dropped her eventually into a small dark closet, from which a door opened upon either hand. She hesitated, trying to guess at her position in the house from the direction she had followed; but it seemed that reason was hopeless before such odds; she must go by chance, and she turned the handle on her left. The door was locked! She had, therefore, Hobson's choice, and was a sport for Fate. She opened the right-hand door, and a gust of wind blew along the passage as if it would have torn her cloak from her. Dull noises issued from the other side of a wall, the sound of plates and dishes, and it would appear that she had reached the neighborhood of the kitchen. A little farther another passage led out of that in which she traveled, and she stood for a time in doubt there, wondering whether to proceed or to take the turning. The sounds of the kitchen were now grown much louder,

indeed, to a noisy clatter, and she came to the conclusion that the turning led thither. It would not be possible for her to pass through the kitchen, for even if Mrs. Hobday and the girl had not already their orders, news of her would at once reach the baronet, who would be on her track almost ere she could break out of the precincts of Daxter. She cast a glance along the passage she had been following, and saw the light brighter ahead. This was her way, no doubt. She started quickly forward again, when a voice spoke, as if it had been in her ear.

"I fear you have lost your way, child. Pray, allow me to guide you."

It was Sir Piers. Her cry of horror betrayed her alarm, for he had approached under cover of the noises, unheard, and had obviously followed her down the stairs from the corridor. He had a very grave and friendly face, as if he were resolved not to import any emotion into this.

"You will find only the cellars yonder," he pursued, indicating the passage ahead. "There is no exit that way. But if you will let me guide you, Barbara, I will find a way out."

"I will not come," she cried, in her agitation.

Sir Piers frowned, but his voice was still gentle. "This is froward, child. I may have deserved something of you, but not this. I beg you not to behave so wantonly. Come, I will show you into a part of the house which at least is cleaner, and more worthy of your presence."

Barbara's quick senses took in the position, and her

spirit mounted to the occasion. She had failed, but she was not yet at an end of her resources; and she saw no good to come in remaining where she was. She followed him without more words. They passed by sundry doors and passages, which avoided the kitchen, after all, into a room of moderate size, very simply and pleasantly furnished, with two windows opening on the sea.

"There is where Cousin Ralph was wont to lie and read, year in, year out," he said, in his even and attractive voice. "He was an invalid, poor creature, and kept his home. He loved the sea, they say, and sat, on a summer day, with the windows open, and the waters breaking in his ears. It soothed him, I suppose. His books are there," and he waved at the walls. "He had a deuced passion for books."

His manner was so easy and so natural, as even his most artificial manner always was, that insensibly Barbara came under its influences. After all, was she mistaken? The man had rescued her from death. He was now surveying her with no insolence, but with gentle appreciation.

"Barbara, I vow that costume suits you amazingly," he said. "Your face is pale, poor child, but the black and the blue become you vastly. 'Tis a real picture, and a pretty one."

If Barbara's cheeks had been pale before, they were now full of color, and at once her fears returned even in stronger force. She looked him in the eye firmly.

"I thank you, Sir Piers," she said, "for your opportune rescue of me, and I should be glad if you would

allow your servants to make preparations for my departure to Yarmouth."

"It is too late, child," said Sir Piers deprecatingly. "You could never be carried there to-night."

"I beg you, sir," entreated Barbara.

"You shall go to-morrow," said he, as if he humored a child.

"I must go to-night," she cried, in agitation.

Sir Piers sat down. "Very well," said he, "if you think it would be best, we will go to-night."

Barbara shuddered not alone at the plural but at the suavity of his tone. She had come to recognize what lay behind it—the iron will, the inflexible purpose. But she flashed out on him with all her spirit.

"It is I who will go, and go alone," she said angrily. "Have you not done your worst? Oh, how have you the heart to sit there and confront me, you who are what you are, and have done what you have? You have nearly lost me my life, and you have saved it. It was your duty, yet I thank you. I want no more to do with you. I pray God I may not see your face again. Open the door, sir, as you claim to be a gentleman, and let me go forth in freedom and security; and perhaps some day I may be able to forget, and forgetting may forgive."

She ceased on a sob, but Sir Piers's expression did not change. He regarded her with firm and pleasant eyes, and rising took a step toward her.

"You forget, Barbara," he said, mildly reproachful, "you forget that you are to be my wife."

CHAPTER XV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF A MAN OF THE WORLD

THERE was a pause of deep silence, ticked off by an old chamber clock that hung upon the wall; and then Barbara recovered herself.

"What is it you mean?" she asked, in bewilderment.

"Why," said Sir Piers, "do you not recall your own words to the Prince? Faith, if you do not, Barbara, I do. Said you, 'This gentleman has done me the honor to ask for my hand, and I have assented.' It was very true, as you will remember I was witness to His Royal Highness. We are a plighted couple, child, plighted before the highest in the land."

It seemed to her that she could read in his confident eyes a twinkling malignity. He played with her, as a cat with the mouse which may not be snatched from its claws. He could afford to jest now that he had her so fast. She hated him for it, even though simultaneously her heart gave out and trembled in her bosom.

"Indeed," she said, "it is like you to make mock of one you have so abominably wounded. It is a piece with your conduct, and all you have ever done. If you had had any shame or pity, or even if you had had any respect for your own name and style of gentleman, you would have hesitated to put this last affront on me. You would not only have your will of me," she cried,

her voice rising troublous with emotion, "but you would also jest, and poke fun, and be satiric at the ruin you plan for me——"

"Barbara! Barbara!" broke in the man, his face betraying a remarkable change; but she would not heed, being now on the wings of her indignation.

"Oh, how dare you avow it!" she cried, with a passionate flow of tears. "How dare you be so shameless as to add the mockery of the spirit to the misusage of the body? You think you have me secure, but you have not, you have not, Sir Piers Blakiston. I am but a poor girl, but I am mistress of myself, and no man shall master me. I protest to God I would rather bury a weapon deep in this bosom than be what you desire and believe I shall be."

She ceased, pale with her passion and trembling with her fears. The tears had flowed even through her scorn, and her weakness was manifest even through her strength. She was there, defiant, her brows drawn at him in hatred, immoderately handsome as he confessed, and capable of desperate things; yet the desperation was the very offspring of terror, and her strength of weakness. At the last she would have fought with tooth and claw like an animal at bay; there were none of the feminine signals of surrender in her; she would not faint or yield from mere despair; she showed, as it flashed across Sir Piers's mind, the courage of despair, and would die fighting. Was she, then, at bay? He threw up a protesting arm, and fell back a pace.

"Child," he cried, in a lower voice, "you do me wrong, you do me wrong. Child will you marry me?"

Barbara, breathing hard, looked at him. What was it he asked? Was it a cynical smile that curled about his mouth? Here was she, defenseless, within the walls and demesnes of the Manor, at the mercy of this man and his creatures. She turned and made an abrupt movement for the door, but his hand detained her.

"Come, Barbara, I think there is need for us to talk a little. Will you not sit down, and if you can cease to look upon me with those innocent and terrifying eyes as on an ogre, I shall feel more comfortable." His tone was light and graceful, and almost ere she knew he had placed a chair for her by the window, outside which the twilight was falling. The sea still sang in the ears, but fainter now, from a receding tide. Mechanically she seated herself, still in a maze.

"I have asked you, Barbara, will you marry me?" repeated Sir Piers, who stood by her chair.

"No," she gasped, suddenly finding her voice, and with a certain harshness of accent.

Sir Piers apparently paid no heed to this negation, but continued the matter of his former remarks. "There is no doubt you think me an ogre, child; and indeed, I suppose most men have played the character sometimes. But indeed, I am none now. I am Piers Blakiston only, one, I think, you thought not unkindly of in the Forest yonder, when the spring was young."

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "when the spring was young, and my eyes were the eyes of a child. I have played that part too long, but now I see, I am grown up, and I know what the world means, and what the faces and appearances of things are worth."

Sir Piers took a turn about the room. He was growing a little restless, for, strong as was his self-control, his blood was vehement and threatened to break its bonds.

"You say truly," he said at last; "they are worth very little. The bulk of life is a sham, and most of us are merely tricksters. But there comes a time to everyone when the sham disappears, when the tricks are dropped, and he or she may emerge for a moment in our real flesh and blood. Does it not seem to you, Barbara, that there is here an instance? Can you recognize that?"

She shook her head. "You are false," she said deliberately. "There is no woman in England who would dare believe you, knowing what I know."

He did not wince, but resumed his argument in his persuasive voice. "You have the right to question me and my sincerity. I freely acknowledge that. There is perhaps no deeper division in human affairs than that chasm which separates man from woman, and a man's ideas from a woman's. There must be always two faces to the shield, and you from your side have the right to pass judgment on me. Yet from my side may there not be a little difference of vision, a little to plead? You are wrong, Barbara, when you call me false. I am not false, but true, true to my own feelings and the stimulus of my heart, which is why I am here, which is why I persecuted you in London, which is why I am begging for your hand now."

"I cannot give it," said she, still in her low voice. "I could not give it, even if I could believe."

"You must believe," he returned, with soft determination, "and you must give it. Have I not said I persecuted you? And do you think there is any change in my nature, child, that I beg you in marriage to-day? No; it is but that I made a mistake in judgment. I am no sentimentalist any more than I am a moralist; I suit my tactics to my conception of necessity. I mistook you, and I paid the penalty. I am the same, only I have come to know you. You must give me your hand, Barbara."

"No—no," she broke forth, startled and indignant, and then met his insidious pleading with an outflow of her angry wounds. "You tell me you have persecuted me, and never was truer word spoken. I came to London to the care of your friend, selected by you, and at your persuasion. I was young, I was ignorant of the world and men, aye, and of women, too. If ever girl cried out for protection and respect, surely 'twas I. I asked but to see the big town; I wished, like every child who is fond of colors and gauds, to look on at the many routs and the great ladies and the brave doings of society; after which I would return to my village and my quiet garden, and lose all but dreams of the great world. Sir, you might have spared a mind so innocent and youth so delicate—you and your creatures. I know not who was in the plot, I know not, indeed, if plot there was, but I do know that yours was a traitorous, black act, capable of no excuse or evasion, and that he who would pervert and ruin in such way is guilty of the most abominable sin! Ah, it was cowardly, it was treacherous, it was cruel!"

Sir Piers's face, even in the twilight, whitened visibly. He leaned with one hand upon the sill, and did not look toward her.

"You speak from your side of the shield, poor child," he said, "and in that light I put my head down and hide my face. The darkness had best swallow up the things that men do and do not blush for. Yet, Barbara, I blush for that, or would so, if I could blush at all. I assure you that my heart is sad to think that I misinterpreted two things—the one your nature, and the other my own feelings."

"You do not repent, you are not ashamed," she said hotly. "Why, your very words tell me you are not ashamed."

"I am ashamed of my mistake," he answered. "I should have known better. I have prided myself on my knowledge of woman; but I misapprehended you. If you had been as I thought you, why should I be ashamed? I should have been proved right by events, and all would have gone happily for both of us. Life would have been properly adjusted for us as I had planned. 'Tis cynical, you will say. Yes, but it is veritable sense. We must cut our cloaks according to our cloth, and fit ourselves in with circumstances. To do anything else would be rank folly, the folly of the sentimentalist, who believes in a thing or arrives at an end against all reason. But having made the blunder, I own it, and I blush; I am ashamed, Barbara, for that. It was another woman I pursued and wronged. I hurt her, God forgive me; but you have no part in her. You are a new person, and I love you. If I

could meet the girl I wronged and would have injured, I would humbly ask her pardon. The girl I love and would not wrong is before me. Barbara, you must be my wife."

"Wife!" she said bitterly, "wife to one who has so poor a sense of honor as to offer to betray an innocent girl!"

"Nay, wife to one who would honor and defend his wife all the days of his life," corrected Sir Piers.

"Wife to Beau Blakiston, the Prince's friend, the past master of intrigues, the associate of rakes!" she said, with a hard laugh.

"Wife to Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone," he said, in a sterner voice, "a wife who need not lower her head before any duchess in the land."

She was silent a moment. The room had darkened, and she could not see his face, which was obscured in the shades of the wall.

"Beau Blakiston," she said at last, "would live in town, and move in elegant circles, amid all the hypocrisy and vice of what is called the Mode."

"Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone," he answered promptly, "would cultivate his country estates in Warwickshire, and fall into a nodding acquaintance with town, which I have no doubt he and his wife would take pleasure in visiting from time to time—to test the Mode, to make their purchases, to see the shows." He laughed pleasantly and very lightly. "I can see Sir Piers Blakiston the very model of a country squire."

"You mean a rustic," said the girl quickly. "Yes, I can see him lapsing into a rustic. It is a very pretty

picture in my mind's eye—swollen waistcoat, ruddy color and high nankins, and a cob to go to market."

"You are laughing at me, Barbara," said Sir Piers, laughing himself. He saw in this the surrender, and his heart leaped and thrilled him. He had kept himself so wonderfully back that the reaction was desperately near. He made a step forward, and seized her hand through the gloom. "Barbara! Barbara!" he cried exulting, and trembling in his triumph.

She made no resistance, but spoke quickly. "Tell me," she said, "when did you repent? How is it you are changed? When did you decide to offer me this honor?"

He felt the warmth of her hands in his, and the softness of the flesh moved him like wine. Looking down into her eyes, which were dim and faint in the twilight, he lied.

"As soon as ever I realized what you were, my dear," he said tenderly. "The very moment you rebuffed me, and stood up so magnificently to the Prince."

"You came," said Barbara, holding back from him, "down to Boldre to tell me what you tell me now?"

"Yes, yes, dear; yes, child, yes," he murmured, and would have taken her in his arms. But with a swing of her body she threw him off, and burst into laughter. She knew he had spoken falsely, though she did not allow for the temptation; and knowing that, saw falsehood in his every act and profession.

"Mercy! I am honored," she said, with angry merriment. "'Tis a pity I did not know this in the coach, and by Beaulieu, for I might have been spared

much. I am glad I can trust you, sir. It is not every man a poor woman may trust. There's deceivers about to take advantage of us, but, la, not you, not Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone, not Beau Blakiston."

"What mean you, Barbara?" he asked, in his amazement at what seemed this unaccountable revolution in her attitude.

"I mean, sir," said she, making him a mock courtesy, "that I am greatly honored by your condescension, but must decline the alliance you propose."

He uttered an exclamation outside his practice of fastidious politeness, but now he was the natural man, and his artifices dropped from him like the tinsel trappings shed in the circus ring. He made a movement and checked himself; opened his mouth to speak, and was silent; and presently she heard his suave voice on the air.

"I regret, Miss Garraway," said he, "that 'tis too late to-night to set you on your way to Yarmouth; but be of no fear. Mrs. Hobday has prepared your rooms in the west wing, and I hope all will be for your comfort."

She dreaded him in this mood more than in his character as a natural man, and now, even with her warmth of blood, was affected by his tone.

"You will refuse to let me go?" she cried.

"I stand in place of your parent," he said politely, "and I cannot think of letting you peril yourself by so mad an adventure. I hope you will be comfortable. I will speak to the housekeeper to provide you with all you require."

As he spoke he made a feint of turning away to

leave her, but she called him back. "Sir Piers, you do not mean this?" she said. "You will let me go. You have just said that you were ashamed of your behavior to me. This—this—you would be ashamed of this also. I do not know what to think of this. It is so strange after what you have said. It cannot be possible."

"My dear Barbara," he said, in a brisk voice, "I assure you that there is no mystery. I am taking charge of you, and you shall come to no harm. It seems to me that your health is affected by the long exposure. Believe me, I deeply regret it. To-morrow, you will be better, and I shall have the pleasure of seeing the roses bloom again." He moved again to the door. "When will you sup, child?"

"I will go to-night," she exclaimed passionately.

"You are a child in tantrums," said Sir Piers. "But I cannot humor you. Come, be sensible, Barbara. You are as safe as in Moyden here in Daxter."

He took her and led her to the window, and she was trembling. "There was a time, child," he said gravely, "when I had thought you had begun to love me. I was mistaken, no doubt——"

"You were, you were! I hated you," she cried, with a sob. But here was too strong a demonstration for Sir Piers's subtle mind. He scented the truth of his own statement.

"Very well," said he, with a sigh. "But if it be so, at least listen to me. I have offered you not only all that is possible in compensation for my mistake, but also a man's heart and life. There is my pledge and *bona fide*. Yet you hesitate to intrust yourself to me,

but would choose rather to go forth into a dark night on unknown hills on an impossible mission. I will not allow it. Let me speak now, not as he who would have been your husband, but as a man older in years, old enough, God knows, to be your father," and here he touched his hair above one ear with a pathetic little wave of his hand. "Look out and see the night." He threw open the window, and the beautiful air streamed in; the sounds of the sea washing among the rocks rose out of the evening, the leaves of the great limes whispered. Insensibly Barbara passed under the spell of the calm night, the benignant stars, the tranquil water, and, not least of all, the grave kindliness of the man. "In an hour, even if we could secure a carriage, landscape, cliff, and sea will be plunged in blackness. I could not let you run the risks of this journey. There is time. Rest and come to yourself. Come, there is here a new Blakiston, as I have told you."

"I see only the same," said Barbara, with a piteous little laugh. Her heart trembled. "I see only one with the same bitter obstinacy, with the same cruel will."

"Maybe he has the same will," assented Sir Piers, now confident of victory, as he rang for the housekeeper and the lights.

CHAPTER XVI

FAVERSHAM RECEIVES HIS LETTER

THE Earl of Chatham lay with his army before Flushing wasting invaluable time in the siege of that port, when he should have been pushing hard for Antwerp to strike simultaneously at the enemy's fleet and capital. From sea and land the breaching cannon roared all day, and in the night Gilbert Faversham could descry from his camp the flare of fires in the unhappy city. Flushing threatened to fall in ruins, but the ruin would do no good to the English cause. It was understood by many of the subalterns that there was a disagreement among the senior generals, and the matter came much into common talk.

"Sir John Hope," said a young smoke-burned captain of artillery, "is well known to be against it. 'What are we doing here, damme?' they say he said. 'Fighting, sure enough; but damme, I could catch 'em all in a trap farther up.'"

"They say that Lord Chatham is set on taking Flushing," observed another.

"Well," said Faversham, laughing lightly, "I have no opinion on the matter, but I hope they won't shift us now we've begun."

"Oh, you need not fear that," said the artilleryman. "We've got to take Flushing; and then we'll take Antwerp," he added indifferently.

It was the second day of the bombardment, and the bugles had sounded some time since. The officers sat refreshing themselves in the cool of the evening, and cracked their jokes, exchanged their experiences, and stared in the pauses toward the doomed town.

The fires were raging beyond the ramparts, and now and again came the boom of a piece across the intervening fields and dykes. Faversham, blackened, dusty, and exhausted, sank back in the earth and watched the night. He was comfortable, being in the condition of physical weariness which is almost a pleasure, which, at least, cedes a pleasure by contrast with past exertion. He smoked his big pipe, and with his gaze toward the stars and the lurid lights of the sky, let his mental vision return across the waters of the Channel to England. He had written several times to Barbara, and had never heard from her once. Had he been in England, living his quiet, wholesome country life, this fact would have appeared before him in large characters and set him aflame with indignation, with jealousy, or with despair. But here in the trenches it receded to its proper place, and beckoned him only with a pleasant melancholy. Barbara's face emerged out of the night, and as he closed his eyes he could see the gate before Moyden and a pretty figure in white in the dusk. He had kissed her! And she had promised to write to him. He began to ask himself sleepily if perchance he had been mistaken in interpreting her mind and attitude. Why had she not written? Her silence struck him with sadness, with the thought of himself as one that fought in distant fields unheeded by a cruel ladylove. He pic-

tured Barbara in the woods that hot August day, and saw her picking the hollyhocks to set in her bosom like a rose. The sounds of night, the sulky booming of the cannon on the ramparts, and the noise of the camp around him, all were insufficient to prevail against his fatigue. Barbara floated through his thoughts vaguely and softly, and indeterminately passed into his dreams. He was awakened by a hand on his shoulder.

"Faversham, here's letters for you. The mail's here."

He sat up with a start, and blinked his eyes at the speaker, which done, his wits resumed their sway slowly, and he put out a hand for the letters. He knew that his mother would have written, but the other?

In the privacy of his tent he read Barbara's letter, that hysteric confession indited in the midst of her fears and anger from Lady Marston's house. It fell with a blow of terrific force upon the young man. He had dreamed of Barbara playing in the meadows of the Forest, and she was in the very grasp of *Vice*, exposed to the satyrs of London. Faversham was a healthy countryman, with a quick heart and a delicacy of taste and thought rarer then than now. He had no love for town; its pleasures, so fair-seeming and so corrupt, had bred in him a distrust of that heartless center of fashion and the mode. To him London was a place in which things were to be purchased, but no place to live in or even to make holiday in for choice. The picture which rose before his vivid imagination was one to alarm and to infuriate. He saw the poor girl trapped by the insidious schemes of a villain who would have the support

of his fellow libertines. That city was full of profligates and harpies; Vice, gilded and under the protection of the highest in the land, moved in the best circles. It was into this infamous maw that his poor Barbara had fallen.

He reread the letter, and from it drew fresh fury: "I have been dreadfully abused, and by no other than that Sir Piers Blakiston." Then should Sir Piers Blakiston be called to account. "He is a villain, and has offered me the grossest insult." Assuredly he should die, this elegant and abominable rake. "I am persecuted by the wretch, and must escape him." Why, it was clear, then, that the poor girl was not yet out of the toils. She labored in them still. The thought was an ecstasy of pain. He looked at the date of the letter. It was two days old. "I would that you were here to call the villain to account for his base conduct, and to protect me, but alas!"—Faversham buttoned the letter inside his tunic. He would go at once. He would fly to the woman who owned all his allegiance and who had appealed to him across the sea. The fire in his blood drove him straight to his colonel, of whom he would ask and obtain leave for urgent affairs at home.

The attack was pushing steadily forward on the landward side, and it was hoped to make a lodging under the ramparts on the following day. To this end the plans had been prepared, and Faversham's regiment of foot was set down for an important operation in the field. They were part of the force engaged to charge on a certain point in the defense after the heavy bombardment of the artillery. It was to the colonel while debat-

ing the tactics of the following day that the ardent Faversham entered.

"Well, sir?" asked the colonel, looking up from his map with obvious reluctance.

"Sir, I would ask permission to return to England to-night."

"Is the man mad or drunk?" asked the colonel, frowning. "This is no time for a joke, sir. You will find it very serious indeed if you do not quit, drunk or mad."

"Colonel, I ask your pardon," pursued Faversham. "I have come at it too abruptly. But you will see I have no alternative. May I beg of you, sir, to step aside and hear what I have to say in private."

"I will be damned if I do," roared the colonel. "Get you gone, sir, or I will have you arrested for insubordination. I never heard of such devilish impudence."

"I entreat you, sir," began Lieutenant Faversham, but on his words one of the other officers testily intervened.

"Oh, send him away, Brett. We have no time."

"Lieutenant Faversham," said the colonel solemnly, "you will retire to your quarters, and consider yourself under arrest until you hear from me. By then I am in hopes you will have returned to your senses."

For a moment Gilbert Faversham hesitated, and then the hopelessness of the contest becoming bare to him, he bowed and retreated without a word. Outside the colonel's tent he stumbled against a man, and recognized him in the pale darkness.

"Major Miles!" he said, and that soldier stopped.

"Who is it?" he asked, and received his name.

"I want some talk with you," declared Faversham feverishly. "There is some matter I should like your advice on. Will you come to my quarters?"

"No," says Miles bluntly, "come to mine. We are to be ready at three in the morning. You have heard that, I suppose?"

Faversham had heard nothing; that is to say, he had heard from London, and nothing else occupied his mind. His restless and intensive spirit could not brook his denial; he could not sit down under the rebuff. In Major Miles's quarters he poured forth his trouble.

"Miss Garraway—you remember her, sir—the beautiful daughter of the Squire at Moyden, who was so kind to you—why, she's in distress. Her father's dead of the smallpox, and her mother, poor soul, is not very worldly-wise. Well, at any rate, Miss Barbara is in great distress. I need not tell you, Major Miles. It is the occasion when a man is required. I beg you to note that she asks for me, she needs me. There is a villain—" He stopped suddenly, as it was borne upon him for the first time whose friend Sir Piers had been. "Great Heaven!" he cried, and seized his friend by the elbow. "Do you know who it is that has wronged her, that would have attempted her honor?"

"No," says Harry Miles dully, polishing his sword.

"Sir Piers Blakiston, who was friend to you," declared Gilbert Faversham, with dramatic effect.

Miles ceased polishing his weapon. "Is it so?" he asked, and presently resumed his occupation. "He

was always a dog, was Blakiston," he said meditatively.

Here was certainly no bubbling of sympathy, but maybe an honest and reticent disapprobation. The lieutenant clamored for more, being stung to a pitch of love and indignation.

"The colonel has refused me leave," he burst out. "He has put me under arrest."

Again Miles considered, but this time the interruption to his pursuit was only momentary. "I suppose he did," he said. "Damme, man, don't I tell you we are to essay the ramparts at three o'clock?"

Faversham eyed him, and the insensitiveness of the man cooled his temper. He was no vaporer.

"At three, is it?" he said, and rose. "I should be in my tent—I am under arrest."

"Oh, he will let you out at three," returned Miles; and conceiving that his remark was humorous, grinned.

"I have no doubt I shall be out by three," assented Faversham.

He was a torrent of impotent fury within. He could have struck that solid lump to the earth, and yet the lump had good qualities, and showed it in the field and elsewhere. But what poor Faversham carried away was a sense of the futility of his will and emotions measured against the will and design of the machine. He was part of it, a bolt, a screw, a rivet, a cog—something which was needed, minute as it was, and which must be sacrificed. Ah, no, it was not he that was being sacrificed, but Barbara, the white and innocent lamb, who had been in his heart for years. In his tent he took out

the letter, and once again read it; and from that reperusal he drew fresh madness. To sit there impotent while Barbara was perishing hundreds of miles away! —the thought was torture. The machine should not exact that of him—it was infamy.

He lay awake until the camp had passed into silence; even the dull cannon had ceased, and about them all, asleep and waking, crept and stirred the little crepitations of the dawn. Far off he heard a bell striking the hour of two from a clock tower in the city, and simultaneously sounds began to spring up and spread about him. The camp was rousing itself for the attempt on the ramparts. In Gilbert Faversham's heart burned anger and despair; he rose, and pushed aside the flap of the canvas. In the east the sky was yet gray and dark, and the chill of the coming day was in the air. He turned to his valise, struck a light, and made some preparations. Without, now, voices were calling, and feet were moving quietly. He blew out his lantern, and went forth into the darkness. He passed down the lines toward the Scheldt.

Lieutenant Gilbert Faversham landed by night at Dover from a brig that carried mails and some private passengers to England. The day had been cloudy, the wind beat from the southwest, and the brig made the passage easily, yet not so quickly but Faversham had time for misgivings. He had committed himself, he had deserted from the army in the field; and the thought struck horror through him, which was only allayed by the crackle of Barbara's letter in his bosom. That was

the compelling argument; that made him oblivious to all that he risked; and that fired him anew with anxiety to push forward, to reach town, and to stand before the woman he loved as champion and avenger.

It was with such anticipations that he traveled to London rather than with any regrets or forebodings on the score of his rash departure. He was missing on the rolls of his regiment and from the service of his country that day, but at least he would be in London, at Barbara's service. In London, however, he was doomed to disappointment. He arrived there the day after Barbara's flight, and learned of this from Lady Marston, to whom he at once presented himself. Lady Marston, as may be well conceived, was noncommittal. Miss Garraway had gone home, and that was all she vouchsafed. It was, indeed, all that Faversham asked. Within an hour he was on his way to the Forest, wondering if, after all, he had come unnecessarily, or if, perchance, he had come —too late.

At Moyden, Mrs. Garraway was discovered in a state of mild wonder. She had expected her daughter daily since receipt of the last letter from town, and felt aggrieved. Barbara should have written to inform her of the postponement. Now Gilbert Faversham, who knew that there had been no postponement, took fright here, and exclaimed in his agitation.

"Why, what is it, Mr. Faversham?" inquired the mother. "Did you not see her in London? Indeed, you might have done so if you had called at Lady Marston's. But, sure, you must have news. I'm glad to see you back, and no doubt a colonel at least. Is the war over?

Maybe that's why Barbara lingers. There must be gay scenes in the town."

"I did call at Lady Marston's," was all that Gilbert answered to this medley; and quickly, in reply to the look that leaped into her face, "She was not there—she had gone—she had started for Moyden."

"Why, that she could not have done, or she would have been here," said Mrs. Garraway, with beautiful simplicity.

"She started—I say she started. She has left Lady Marston," said Faversham in distress, and there was torn from him the cry, "Oh, why did you entertain the villain? Why did you trust him?"

Mrs. Garraway was speechless with amazement, but at last found her voice. It dawned on her that Sir Piers Blakiston was aimed at by this foolish young man. She rebuked him for his rudeness. "It may be that your ill-will to an honorable and distinguished gentleman is capable of an explanation," she said, with significance; "but an explanation to be justified should be *reasonable*. I cannot blind myself, Mr. Faversham, and I regret to see you overpowered by so rank a vice as jealousy. Besides," she added complacently, "you have no right on your side, for, as you are an old friend, I may take the liberty of acquainting you with a secret. My Barbara is a beautiful girl, and is greatly admired in town." She tossed her head and bridled as though it had been herself of whom she spoke. She triumphed in what she imagined to be her daughter's triumph, and in that beauty renewed her youth and bloom.

"Aye," said Gilbert bitterly, "I have no doubt she's

much admired." He was reluctant to unfold to the mother his fears and his suspicions, nor dared he acquaint her with what he knew from Barbara herself. If the daughter had not informed her mother, he shrank from doing so himself. So he said no more on that point, but returned to Barbara's journey. "We must make inquiries at once. Something may have happened."

"Happened!" said Mrs. Garraway, at once in a panic. "Ah, you mean—gracious heavens, not highwaymen!"

"Anything," he said awkwardly, "an accident, a—a delay, a—I will post at once to Winchester and so backward. She may have stayed upon the road. She may have done a dozen things!"

But now that Mrs. Garraway's fears were aroused, she would not rest or be comforted; and so Gilbert Faversham was at once equipped with two good horses and a light chaise to conduct his investigations.

He had reached Moyden close on dusk, and he left it within two hours. As he went through Brockenhurst at a sharp pace, the coachman cried out in warning to some villagers that crossed the road. Faversham put his head out of the window, and as he did so the light of a lantern carried by one of the men flashed in his face. As the carriage rolled on, a voice in the little knot said:

"Dang me, if that bain't young master back."

"Why," said another of the company, "I fancied I knew him, Joe Fassett. He be going home, I reckon, and the war's over."

Fassett, the hind, scratched his head stupidly. "Noa," he said dully, "'a be not going home. 'Tisn't the way to Ringwood that way. But the war's over, sure enough," upon which they continued their journey to the Rose and Crown, and there discussed the matter with others over their ale.

Meanwhile Faversham was well on the road to Lyndhurst, and succeeded eventually in reaching Winchester by midnight. At the mews he had no difficulty in finding that Miss Garraway had set out for the Forest on the evening of the previous day. She had been accompanied by her maid, and had been driven by a young man, by name Kenyon, who had reported an attack on the chaise by highwaymen. At the news Gilbert's breath came easier. Highwaymen, and not— He begged for further information, and was referred to Kenyon himself for particulars. The youth was amiable and quite disposed to narrative, even though he was tired and on the point of seeking his bed. He told the story with graphic touches, and was loud in praise of the lady. By the chance of fortune he recognized Mr. Faversham as one who was a squire of some note by Ringwood. His tale ran smoothly until the rescue, at which he was pulled up sharp.

"A slight man of forty, very foppish," said Gilbert, with a sudden realization and a new access of despair.

"Maybe, sir," said Kenyon. "'Twas dark, and I could not see clearly; but 'tis certain he was a fine gentleman from his voice. And Miss Garraway seemed to know him, so that, she being wounded in a manner—not

that it was more than a prick in the arm, sir, I should say—well, she being as she was, so to say, was taken into the gentleman's chaise, and——"

"Damnation! What?" said Faversham, starting.

The man stared. "Why, the lady went the rest of the way in the gentleman's chaise," said he in surprise, "and the man and the maid drove with me."

"Where did you take them?" inquired Gilbert, in angry agitation. "You did not take them to Moyden?"

"Why, no, sir," answered Kenyon, with something of sullenness in his tone. "For the man, who was an honest, friendly fellow, stopped me at Lyndhurst, and bid me trouble to go no farther, as they were expected at the inn there; and so after a glass, I turned about and came back to Winchester."

Gilbert Faversham had started to his feet and paced the stable in which the interview had taken place.

"What said the maid?" he asked at last.

"The maid said nothing, sir," replied Kenyon. "The man did everything."

It was clear now what had happened. The maid had been bought, and Barbara had fallen into the hands of that villain. Gilbert thanked the postboy, and took his leave. By further inquiries he learned that nothing was known in the mews of any stranger who had driven to Lyndhurst, and consequently it was evident that Sir Piers had not come to these stables for his horses. It was, of course, possible that he had changed elsewhere in Winchester, and Gilbert had before him the

alternatives of staying to push his inquiries here, or of going back to the Forest. He took his decision at once, for he had gathered from Kenyon that the two chaises had gone together at all events as far as Lyndhurst. To Lyndhurst, then, he at once proceeded, turning in his tracks for the second time that day.

At Lyndhurst, which he reached when all were abed and the night was full of stars, he had some difficulty in arousing the landlord at the posting inn, and when he was awake he was in no good temper. To Faversham's questions as to a chaise that had reached the village on the previous evening the innkeeper answered surlily that many chaises passed there.

"Two came together," cried Gilbert anxiously, "and about nine o'clock, I should guess."

"Maybe they did, and maybe they didn't," said the innkeeper snappishly. "I don't keep all things that happens in my mind."

"Damme, Redgrave, think of it, man," besought the youth anxiously.

"What, is't you, Mr. Faversham?" said the innkeeper in surprise, and with quite another voice proceeded, "I thought you were in Flanders. Are you back from the wars, sir? Welcome, sir, I'm sure, and glad we all be to think they're over."

"Yes, I am back," assented Faversham shortly, and asked again, "What of the chaises?"

"Now I remember, Mr. Faversham," said the landlord, in his most affable tone, "there was two came up about the hour you say last night, and one was drove by Jim Kenyon. Will it be that, sir?"

"Yes, yes," cried Gilbert eagerly, "and the other?"

"Why, t'other did not stop, sir, but rolled past on the way to Brockenhurst."

Redgrave was astonished at the abruptness with which the young man departed, leaving behind him hardly so much as a "thank you" or a "good night"; but after staring down the dark road he went back to his bed, being the third man who had recognized Faversham since his return to the Forest. There was to be yet another, which was no other than the hostler of the Rose and Crown, at which hostelry the impetuous young man was forced to pull up on his hurricane way from Winchester. He knew no more of Sir Piers's carriage than that it had run upon the Brockenhurst road. He must make inquiries here. The hostler, an old friend, did not resent being fetched out of his bed, and, lighting the fag-end of a pipe, was agreeable to a chat with Mr. Faversham. Now he came to think of it, there had been the noise of a chaise running through late on the previous evening, but the village being chiefly in virtuous retirement, he had not heard any guesses as to its identity. "For the matter of that," suggested the hostler, "it might ha' been any gentleman from the north making for Lymington."

But Gilbert Faversham knew better.

"Lymington!" he said, and pondered. The chaise had gone through Brockenhurst, but had not reached Moyden.

Was it to Lymington it had gone? or was it Christchurch?

"It was Sir Piers Blakiston's chaise," he said, frown-

ing thoughtfully at the hostler; upon which he had the reward of his confidence.

"Why," says the hostler, pulling at his pipe, "then he must ha' been on his way to Sir Thomas Rankin's, which they do say he has bought."

"Sir Thomas Rankin's!" echoed Gilbert.

"By Beaulieu creek, sir," explained the hostler. "'Tis a mighty dull place, they say, and Sir Thomas is never there; but 'tis known Sir Piers is after it, as he has stayed there of late."

Faversham was afoot again, as abruptly as he had left the landlord in Lyndhurst. But the slow-minded hostler did not resent his precipitate departure.

"Why, I might have asked Master Gilbert about the wars!" he said to himself as he knocked out his pipe and went to bed again in some disappointment.

But Lieutenant Faversham was driving fast across the moor toward Boldre. He passed the lane that turned into the Moyden woods and climbed up the hill beyond the river. Already the night promised the dawn, and the weary horses went at a slackening speed. Once upon the heath, however, they mended their pace, and in the gray of breaking morning Gilbert Faversham drew up with his groom before Sir Thomas Rankin's desolate house.

Not a sign of life marked it; the chimneys were smokeless, the blinds and curtains drawn, and the trees surrounded the dreary mansion like dispirited and vacant ghosts. A wind of dawn blew over the wan garden, waking whispers in the leaves. Gilbert rapped on the door and rang, and in a window above presently a

light shone. A head was thrust forth, and a voice called to know who knocked.

"'Tis I, Gilbert Faversham, and I would speak with Sir Piers Blakiston," he answered loudly.

The voice returned in answer that Sir Piers was not there.

"'Tis a lie," says Faversham harshly. "He was here last night. Open, or I will break the door down."

After that there was silence, the head was withdrawn, and a consultation was indicated by a conference of whispers.

"I will give Sir Piers Blakiston three minutes to open the door, and if 'tis not done then I will burst through," cried the young man, all afire and trembling. "He knows who I am. I am Lieutenant Faversham of Desney, and I am here to call him to account for what he knows full well."

He waited until the three minutes were almost up, and then the door was slowly unbarred. A woman of middle age, hastily dressed, appeared in the opening.

"Sir Piers Blakiston is not here, sir," she repeated, in a frightened voice.

Faversham pushed by her roughly and entered. He bade the woman attend him, and she followed him from the hall into that farther room wherein Barbara had made her discovery some four-and-twenty hours previously, and from which she had fled in terror and in shame. With an imperious gesture Faversham commanded the woman to set down the light she held.

"Call Sir Piers Blakiston at once," he said. "My business will brook no delay." She opened her mouth

to speak, but he cried imperiously, as if to anticipate her denials with a threat, "Otherwise, I will search every room in the house."

"You are at liberty to search every room, sir," she answered, not without some dignity, "save that, I trust, where my daughter lies. But Sir Piers is not here."

Silenced, if not convinced, by her acquiescence, Gilbert paused to consider.

"He was here yesterday," he said presently, and turned on her sharply, "I have evidence to prove he was here yesterday."

"Then, sir, if you have evidence, you are convinced; and if you will, you shall have evidence now that he is not here to-night—the evidence of your eyes."

Again he considered. He was puzzled and mortified by his rebuff; and at the same time, if what she said were true, there was nothing to be gained by further parleying. He fired a random shot at her.

"How many people arrived in Sir Piers's chaise last night?"

"Maybe, sir, it will be easier for your witnesses who know of Sir Piers's arrival to tell you that," was her reply, to which she added, "This is Sir Thomas Rankin's house." She was secretive, as he guessed, and prudent, and she had the remains of a bold beauty though she was past middle age. Gilbert distrusted her. Yet he could do nothing more that night, and most reluctantly quitted the melancholy house. As he did so, the dirge of the creek rose higher and louder on the nocturnal air, as if it called him, called him back from the moor

to its dark shores and ominous waters. But the horses' heads were laid westward, the chaise started with a jerk, and Gilbert Faversham turned his back on the murmuring creek in which the tide was once more rolling toward the seas of the Solent.

CHAPTER XVII

SIR PIERS AT BAY

WHAT he had hitherto kept from the mother, Faversham must now set before her. He felt the necessity of this as he drove back to Moyden, and his courage quailed before the work. To phrase what he feared in his own heart was sufficient misery to a young man of his sensitive imagination, while to explain it, as he felt he should have to explain it to Mrs. Garraway, in broad and bald words, would be a more dreadful undertaking. Nor was he mistaken as to the magnitude of his task. The mother, strung to a pitch of alarm for her daughter, flew to hysteria on his return. Then Barbara was murdered! murdered by highwaymen! This view he combated. Barbara had been attacked by robbers, but had escaped, owing to the arrival on the scene of a second chaise. He added slowly that he had traced her so far, and that there she had vanished. She had been put into the other chaise in her swoon, and had been driven off.

At this point the lady broke out.

"Did I not say so?" she cried. "She is murdered, dear heart! 'Twas an accomplice in the chaise, and no other. I wonder that you can be so simple, Mr. Faversham, as not to see it."

"'Twas no accomplice," said Gilbert bluntly, "'twas a rescue. For the gentleman in the chaise was"—he paused—"Sir Piers Blakiston," he said deliberately.

Mrs. Garraway started up.

"Sir Piers!" she cried joyfully. "Oh, did Sir Piers rescue my child? How delightful! how amazingly romantic! What an odd and happy meeting! Dear Gilbert, see how Heaven shapes our actions even against our will, bringing strange things to pass."

"Indeed, it is a strange thing," said Gilbert, speaking hoarsely and with emotion, "for Miss Garraway is gone, snatched away, disappeared. There is no track of her."

Mrs. Garraway stared, and then realizing that there was as yet a discrepancy, something to be explained, began to explain it for herself.

"I hope Sir Piers has not met with any accident while he was rescuing my daughter," she said complacently. "But I will not believe it. I have faith, Mr. Gilbert."

"She should have been here, madam, last night," he said, with savage curtness. "Where is she now?"

Once more Mrs. Garraway's alarm began to grow; her fears sprang out in several directions, and she fluttered like a frightened fowl.

"They have both been murdered!" she declared.

Lieutenant Faversham made an exclamation of annoyance. He was pale and stern, a forbidding angel of ill news.

"I have no doubt she is alive," he said; "she is with Sir Piers."

What he intended to signify dawned on her, looking in his face. She gave vent to her mingled indignation, agitation, and disbelief, in a cry.

"You do not mean——"

"He has abducted her," explained the young man, brutally frank at last; for whereas he had hovered on the brink so long with delicate anxieties, he now plunged boldly in.

"I have had information which leaves no opening for doubt," he went on, and blurted forth the tale of Barbara's letter.

Mrs. Garraway was incredulous. Too securely based upon her prejudices and prepossessions, her fine romantic theories would not topple and fall. They defied him and his specious arguments, which she did not hesitate to set down to oversuspiciousness and misinterpretation. Moreover, he was in a state for jealous suspicions, as she had known all along, and she hugged the idea to herself, comforting and persuading herself with it. She refused utterly to face the outlook, and was content to cry out at one time that her daughter and Sir Piers were dead in some corner of the Forest, dead at the treacherous and barbarous hands of the gypsies, and at another to assure herself and Gilbert that Barbara would be delivered safe and sound at Moyden by the morning.

Finally, driven by his train of coincidences, she turned on him desperately with a question as to Sir Piers's chaise.

How did he know it was Sir Piers? And upon learning that he had no more evidence than his suspicions, the confluence of circumstances, and a resemblance identified from the postboy's account, she triumphantly pronounced that it was *not* Sir Piers, and prepared to rest on her victory, without appearing to realize that she had

plunged her daughter's fate into deeper and even darker mystery.

The good lady was given up by Faversham, who lay awake during the short night, constructing plans by which Barbara should be traced. It was, however, accident rather than design that gave him the clew he needed and led to the first of a series of incidents in which this narrative and the chief characters are involved.

Early in the morning he was in Beaulieu, as here was the last outpost of his hopes, and here was where he had lost the scent. He must pick it up again. The house was gray and unhandsome, the demesne presented to the eye no greater attraction by day than by night; indeed, its ugliness and sinister loneliness was more sharply revealed in the pitiless light. It was quite certain that Sir Piers had visited the house, but it was certainly probable that he had not stayed. Whither, then, had he gone with his victim? The world was open to him. He might have made for any hiding place, or he might, his unhappy quarry caught up and seized, have doubled on his tracks and returned to London. In London, no doubt, he would be safer from observation than in the country. As Gilbert wandered in the vicinity, with these thoughts in his head, he came into a lane that led to the creek, and descended it, deep in his conjectures. He had just made up his mind to push inquiries in the neighborhood as to the visit of the chaise, in the hope of tracing it point by point to its destination, when he descried the smoke curling from a cottage among the trees. Here was clearly the place at which to begin his investigations, and he entered the gate and walked up to the door.

The cottage lay on a lower piece of the bank, and from it the whole breadth of the creek was visible, muttering and lapping in its basin. The strong morning sun was glancing on the rippling water. Before the door a man in shirt sleeves was engaged in caulking a boat, and him Gilbert Faversham addressed.

No, he was a fisherman, and had seen no chaise, had heard tell of none. He did not interrupt his occupation, save only, on being addressed, to look at the speaker. Here was a hopeless start. Surely, the sooner he was back on the moor the better. Yet he added, mechanically and without intention:

"The chaise contained a gentleman and a young lady."

The fisherman straightened himself for the first time, fixed a blue contemplative eye on the waters of the creek, and pondered.

"There was a gentleman hired my boat that night," he said leisurely. "That was late. I was near up at the inn that night, being so late."

Gilbert's blood quickened. Fate came to him in the guise of John Garth, fisherman.

"At what hour?" he asked abruptly.

Once more the man of slow mind deliberated.

"Maybe about twelve, maybe not," he said at last, and after a further pause, "'Twas to pick up a girl that was driven out to sea with the gale."

Even here he might have been left to his dull memory, and the chance might have passed; for a man may well rescue a girl on a very bad night, if one be so foolish as to adventure forth.

Gilbert, his pulse falling, was turning away with impatience when the man added, with a broadening grin of appreciative recollection:

"A very elegant gentleman he was, and there was little of his elegant clothes left when we'd done, I warrant."

The word "elegant" rang in Gilbert's ears. He turned back.

"A man of forty—of an average fairness, slight and between heights?" he asked breathlessly.

The man pondered. "That would be he," he assented.

"And the girl?" pursued the young man, scarcely able to control his excitement.

"She was picked up off the Needles," said Garth, "and come ashore by Mottistone in the Island. As pretty a young lady as I might wish to clap eyes on."

You will imagine now with what intestine commotion Gilbert Faversham received this news, and how he plied his questions as if they had been a weapon of fence in his hand. He thought he discerned the truth; he jumped at the conclusion, and in a little had his purpose well defined. The man caulking his boat became the messenger of Providence, and was here ready to his design. He struck a bargain with Garth as Sir Piers had done, and with such similar rashness as to set the boatman gaping over the folly of two successive simpletons. Within the hour they were riding down the creek on the way to Yarmouth. Yarmouth had been Gilbert's suggestion, and had been determined as the goal of this sea journey, mainly from one consideration. This was the natural

port for communication with the Hampshire coast through Lymington, and it might very well be supposed that anyone escaping out of the Island would come by Yarmouth. Of course, it was open to doubt if Barbara could escape and had escaped, but, setting that terrible anxiety aside, he argued that she must go through the harbor on her way home, and that he could reach Mottistone over the hills very readily from Yarmouth. The trail had been picked up again by God's providence at Mottistone; thither for certain he must go, even though it was most unlikely that he would realize there the object of his expedition.

Garth dropped him at Yarmouth in the early afternoon, being delayed by contrary winds, and immediately Gilbert set out across the hills. It was no great distance, but the roads were rough, the wind blustered from the south, and he took a longer time over the journey than pleased him. Moreover, he had been held in Yarmouth by the necessity of making inquiries, which were, however, without avail. In the end he came to Mottistone in time for dinner, a refreshment of which he was now in sore need, since he had left Moyden without waiting for breakfast. It was a warm August day, tempered by the bluff wind. The bay from Freshwater to the Blackgang sparkled with foam heads, which rode gayly in from the Channel, and wavered and melted ere they came to land. The beach was loud with the noise of water, and the air was pleasantly full of those sounds and scents of the sea to which a maritime place is accustomed. Gilbert Faversham ate his dinner and plied his tongue at the inn simultaneously. The craft with which he had begun

proved to be unnecessary, for there were no restrictions upon the gossip of the villagers, and Sir Piers Blakiston was no influence in a place which hardly knew him. He learned, therefore, of the boat that had put in, and of its occupants; and what was more than all else, he heard of Daxter. That news brought him to his legs.

"Daxter belongs to Sir Piers Blakiston, you say?" he cried, unable to credit his good fortune.

But there was no dubiety on that point, and to Daxter he bent his steps as soon as he might, with a firm resolution and an overflowing heart. There could scarce be any doubt as to Barbara's fate, yet he had, maybe, come in time for vengeance, in time to place that monument on the grave of love.

The gulls were calling offshore as he entered the gates; and to anyone looking from the windows of the front he was well visible. Yet it seemed that none saw him advance; certainly none opposed his entrance into the large hall. The housekeeper with the keys opened to him. She was of another kind than the woman at the Beaulieu house, being older, sparer, and less intelligent. Her mien expressed the model of propriety and deference, but she was plainly uninterested. Faversham would have said that nothing could bring curiosity to peep out of those eyes or to wag that tongue. She was silent, inscrutable, a blank wall rather than a human mind, something with appetites and sensations, with duties and privileges, and that was all. She regarded him as she would have regarded a boy from the alehouse.

"This is Sir Piers Blakiston's house?" he inquired, and on her answer, with loud civility hoped that his name

be carried to the master. Sir Piers, it seemed, was out, and Gilbert hesitated, baffled in a way by so simple an accident. The sea was making moan behind him, and the birds were crying louder.

"There is a young lady staying here?" he said abruptly.

The woman stared at him.

"Sir Piers is out," she repeated.

"I say that you have a young lady in the house," he said again, with heat.

The woman shook her head.

"Sir Piers is not married," she said. "He has no one living with him."

She waited, passive, for a message, and he saw her invitation in her eye. After all, he was not certain that Barbara was in Daxter. Much might have happened in thirty-six hours, and he regretted now his abrupt departure from the inn before winnowing all the information possible. If Sir Piers was away, might not Barbara also be away? Might they not have gone together? and whither? He discovered a dozen perplexities before him, as he stood there, and there was a woman hanging on his message. He gave it curtly.

"When Sir Piers returns, tell him I will give myself the satisfaction of calling on him."

He turned away, and there ran in his head now the suspicion that Sir Piers might not after all be out. Had the woman lied to him? He paused on his way down the avenue, but presently went on again. He might get better information at the inn, and in any case he would return. There was no doubt as to his return.

But the inn had little more news for him. It was reported that Sir Piers had come ashore with a shipwrecked party who had been cared for at Daxter, but no one spoke with the assurance of his own eyes. From Garth, Gilbert knew that a girl had been rescued. Was it Barbara? Or was he on a foolish, bootless chase? He would not believe that, and with every hour his conviction as to the truth of his guess was strengthened, and along with it grew also the power of his feeling toward the baronet. He watched the road toward Daxter, and set others to watch; but it was growing late before a villager came to him with the tidings he wished. Sir Piers had returned.

On the top of that Gilbert set off hot foot for Daxter, and once more clamored at the hall door. Once more the impassive housekeeper received him, and this time offered no excuses. Sir Piers was in, and she would, as he desired, carry Lieutenant Faversham's name. It may be doubted if she had not already mentioned his visit, but the gentle air of surprise with which the baronet received his visitor betrayed no sign of either indifference or deep astonishment.

"Back from Flanders, lieutenant?" he said cheerfully; "then we must, I hope, light our bonfires. The expedition has accomplished its object? Eh, we must drink a bottle to this, sir. What say you?"

He put out his hand to ring for a servant, when he was interrupted.

"I have not come to talk about the war, sir," declared Gilbert, feeding on his savage jealousy, "but to call you to account for wronging an innocent girl."

Sir Piers turned quickly, and ever so slight a frown crossed his features.

"An innocent girl!" he repeated thoughtfully. "To call me to account! Pray sit down, lieutenant, and let us hear more of this. I think I may offer no apologies for being vastly interested."

"Sir," said Gilbert angrily, "your cynical flippancy is of a piece with your treachery. But it is useless between us. I know what your conduct has been to a girl who was without her natural protectors and helpless."

Sir Piers sat down, but his visitor did not avail himself of the invitation.

"You mean—" inquired Sir Piers courteously, and cocked his ear at the other for the answer.

"There is no need of names," burst forth the lieutenant, "between you and me here. I am here to bring you to justice, and to offer to that unhappy lady the aid she has lacked but shall lack no longer."

"I begin to see, Mr. Faversham," said Sir Piers suavely. "You desire to force a duel on me, and have hit on a pretext. If I remember, it is a habit of yours. Well, it is not for me to deny you. But meanwhile, I should like you, if you would be so good, to indulge my curiosity, and tell me what you do here so far from Flanders, where, I understand by this day's mails, our gallant army, or—most of it," he added deliberately, "is engaged in the capture of Flushing."

"I have tracked you here, sir, to deal with you as I intend to do," announced Gilbert Faversham tensely.

Sir Piers shrugged his shoulders.

"You are very theatrical, Mr. Faversham," he said. "I confess I do not understand you. I will not feign ignorance as to the identity of that dear lady at whom you hint, and who, I am able and privileged to tell you, has consented to be my wife."

Faversham uttered a cry of incredulity.

"You lie," he said. "'She wrote to me——"

The flicker of Sir Piers's lips alone showed that he had been aiming at this piece of information and had succeeded. He interrupted with a gesture.

"There is a vulgar saying, Mr. Faversham, that much water has gone under London Bridge since then. You will possibly remember it, and I beg you not to discredit so time-worn an expression too hastily. In the first place, I am not aware with what credentials you come on this curious errand, when you should be, so far as I understand my newspapers, some hundreds of miles across the Channel. And yet, even supposing you had a claim to press yourself upon me as you are doing, I do not know that I am entitled to give you any answer without consultation with the lady herself, who, unhappily, is out of reach."

"She is here," roared Gilbert, white with the concentration of his passion.

Sir Piers opened his eyes widely.

"Indeed!" he said, with cold civility, "and pray on what grounds do you make this amazing assertion, Lieutenant Faversham?"

Gilbert spoke fast.

"You have her here. I have traced you all the way from London. I came upon your tracks at Winchester,

I followed you to Lyndhurst, and I ran you to earth at Beaulieu."

"To water, rather," corrected Sir Piers mildly. "Yes, you are quoting my itinerary very truly, Mr. Faversham; but let me ask again, what bearing this has on your presence here, or on the astounding statement you have made."

"Miss Garraway was kidnaped by you in the Forest," he answered, "and was taken to Sir Thomas Rankin's house by Beaulieu. She was landed here yesterday morning. I have all the facts."

There is no doubt that the image of John Garth the fisherman playing fate passed in that moment through Sir Piers's brain. With a quick eye he picked up the various links in the chain, and saw to how much he must confess. That Faversham had traced Barbara through the Forest was certain, and fortuitously he had now identified the man who had followed her and rescued her from the gypsies with the baronet himself. The weak spot in the chain was the inference as to Barbara's identity with the girl who had landed, of which there was no proof, and Sir Piers directed himself to that.

"I had the good fortune," he said, "to be of some little assistance to a lady who was beleaguered in the Forest. She is one, Mr. Faversham, who has my esteem and yours, and I hope she is now happily enjoying the peace and sweetness of the country home which she loves, and which I have no intention of our marriage depriving her."

His equanimity, coupled with what Faversham regarded as the astounding lie, goaded the young man.

"She is not in her home, as you know well," he said. "You have stolen her from her home, and robbed her of —God knows," he broke down on the end. Sir Piers's front showed no change.

"You will permit me to say, Mr. Faversham, that you are a very astonishing young man," he said, "and somewhat of a nuisance. But in a measure I can excuse your insolence if there is any truth in what you say. Let us come to facts, which concern me indeed more than you. Is Miss Garraway not returned to Moyden?"

"You know it," blurted forth Faversham.

Sir Piers's deprecating gesture was inimitable; it was completely expressive simultaneously of his powerlessness to prevent this headstrong folly, and his reluctance to visit it with its proper penalty.

"Then," said he, "with your leave I will make at once preparations to go back to Hampshire. You concern me; you frighten me."

He rose as he spoke and rang the bell, and to the servant who appeared gave his orders.

"Have a bag packed, and let the chaise be ready by eight o'clock," he commanded; and to Faversham, "If I remember aright, there is a packet for Lymington about ten. We may catch that."

It must be confessed that Faversham was greatly nonplussed by this attitude, and he began to throw over all his convictions—those convictions which had strengthened during the last twenty-four hours, and which had called upon him as avenger in the name of love. He wavered. Was this the air of a guilty man? But he

made one protest, sullen and resolute, against his growing doubts.

"You brought her here," he said. "You were seen to land with her. There is no possibility of wriggling from that fact."

"I came here, Mr. Faversham," thundered Sir Piers with his black look on him, "with an unhappy girl whom by good luck I saved from drowning on my way to my seat here."

"You have a wonderful knack in rescuing young ladies," sneered the lieutenant.

Sir Piers cooled instantly.

"Mr. Faversham, I understood you to be of reputable family, and I was led to believe you a young man of parts who might"—he paused—"make his mark in the army. It seems, however, that madness has seized on you, and not only induced you to desert from your country's arms at a critical moment—for I can conceive no other explanation of your presence here—but also to fling wild charges in my face. I conceive that this wildness may have come to you under the stress of an insane jealousy, for which you should be whipped like any schoolboy. But I will not deal with you so. You shall be taught the lesson of self-restraint and the evils of self-esteem in another way. You shall have your meeting, but not until I have seen to a matter which presses far more, and that is the disappearance of Miss Garraway. I set out upon that errand to-night."

"You are good at excusing yourself from a meeting, sir," said Gilbert Faversham passionately. "If you will remember, you did so upon a previous occasion."

But for all his display of passion, he felt troubled and doubtful and sore.

Sir Piers sighed gently.

"Really, lieutenant, if I may still call you so, you are impossible," he said wearily, "for if you will remember, the postponement of that meeting discovered to you how unnecessary it was. Let me suggest to you, that possibly in this case also you may be proceeding on an erroneous assumption. I am no blood eater, though I believe I have had that reputation in some quarters; but it is my best proof, that instead of ridding the earth forthwith of a meddlesome, stupid fellow, I am at all this trouble of explanation."

Faversham stood abashed and silent; dregs of distrust were in his mind, and a sense of shame. He could not accept this man's statement, this man whom he instinctively hated; and yet—he could not deny the plausibility of the arguments, which, if they were true, would make him out more than a fool, a blunderer, and the author of scandal. Vaguely he tried to recall the thread by which he had reached his conclusion, but his mind was full of excitement and confusion. What had Garth told him about the gentleman and the boat? He felt that if he could only get that clearly in his head he would have an answer to this specious villain. But no ideas ran to his aid, and it was Sir Piers who spoke.

"And now, Mr. Faversham, if you are content, I will ask you to leave me, as I have many matters to attend to ere I go. I will not offer you a seat in my chaise, as I feel that it would be a mockery in the circumstances. I trust we shall meet more *convenant* when we

meet next, which, I suppose, will be in the company of friends."

He bowed profoundly as he finished, and perforce Gilbert returned his bow, and turned away.

"I will hold you to your word," he said hoarsely, "I will wait for you."

Outside he emerged into the gloaming, which was deep between the limes. The house was fading slowly into the night, and up in the square tower upon the seaward side burned a light in the windows. He noticed it without attention, not guessing who sat there, nor how near was the object of his search. He passed into the lane, and retraced his way miserably to the inn.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE SQUARE TOWER

THE young man's suspicions moved like a tide, now rising and now sinking in ebb. Yet out of his wretched reflections issued at last one fact. He recalled now with precision that the fisherman had spoken of a gentleman in search of a girl who had been *blown out to sea.* If that were so, he had proved that Sir Piers was the man, and it followed for certain that the girl was—Barbara. He had been hoodwinked, tricked by a crafty scoundrel, who would clearly stop at nothing to gain his end. On reaching this stage, Faversham clapped on his hat and ran forth into the darkness. The lanes round Daxter were deeply embowered in night. He pulled out his watch, and by the light from the tavern window noted the hour. Sir Piers was to start at eight. If he had not lied as to that also, he would be starting now. Faversham ran fast along the lanes with the determination to face the man forthwith and call him to account. As he reached the entrance to the avenue he heard the sound of wheels on the gravel and the chinking of harness. Was it possible that Blakiston was setting forth? And if it were so, perhaps his tale was true after all—true, at least, in this particular, that Barbara was no longer in the town, but had returned on her way to Moyden. The horses emerged from the gateway, and the dark shape of the chaise was visible behind them. What did

it matter if it were so? The man must die. A sudden plethora of rage seized on him, bringing the blood to his face and brain. He rushed forward, shouting to stop the carriage, gesticulating and crying wild words.

"Stop—damn you!"

For an instant the horses swerved, as if the driver had checked them and then freed the reins ere the check was effective; a voice sounded low in the chaise; and under the whip the animals lifted their feet, threw up their heads, and broke into a sharp trot. The chaise swinging on its springs jolted into the lane, turned, struck Faversham as he menaced it to the earth, and bowled away into the darkness.

The pole had taken him on the shoulder, and he had narrowly escaped the hoofs of the team. He rose, sore, dazed, but a caldron of balked passion. Yet what was there to do save to look hopelessly into that night which had swallowed up his enemy? Still under the effects of his fall he stepped dizzily on to the footpath, where the white lodge loomed in the darkness, and in the act stumbled against someone. He civilly begged pardon in spite of his confusion of mind, and discovered slowly that it was a woman with whom he had collided. The lodge keeper was shutting the gates, and suddenly his lantern blinked dimly on the scene. He called out:

"Lizzie, Lizzie! Is't you there? What are you doing there?"

As he spoke he approached Faversham, and threw the light upon him. Its rays fell upon the woman, too, and Faversham noted something faintly familiar in her face.

"Yes, father," she said, but she was staring curiously at the lieutenant.

"Come in, lass," exhorted the lodge keeper, who was an elderly, dull-eyed man in the garb of a gardener.

"Who's this?" he added immediately, and turned his lantern full on the stranger.

"'Tis—'tis a friend of Sir Piers's," replied the girl glibly, much to Faversham's astonishment.

He turned his gaze upon her sharply again, but her eyelids were demurely lowered. Where had he seen her? Quickly came the answer; she was the maid who had entered to take Sir Piers Blakiston's commands that afternoon. The girl looked up at him, and then deftly dropped her eyes once more.

"Yes, I am a friend of Sir Piers," he said suddenly. "I have unhappily just missed him. He rides to Yarmouth and crosses to-night, I believe."

The lodge keeper thought that this was so. Again Faversham glanced at the girl, who showed pretty even through the darkness.

"Get you in, Lizzie," enjoined the man, and she made a movement to be gone; but Gilbert was aware that she moved slowly, and that the shafts of her eyes were shot at him again. It seemed to him as if she would have spoken if she had dared; but her glance returned to her father, and she continued her movement. She passed through the gates, and the man shut them to. Without salutation he disappeared, and his daughter's form melted into the blackness of the avenue. Gilbert stood there for a few moments, with a heart that fluttered strangely, and a mind that wondered. Why had the

girl interrogated him with her eyes so persistently? Was it rustic curiosity, or, maybe, even the challenge of a rural beauty? He glanced through the gates, and thought that he descried a white shadow flitting in the distance. He drew near and furtively tried the ironwork, but the key had been turned in the padlock. Oddly enough, this provoked his resolution further, stung him from indifference into a definite purpose. He walked along the wall of the park, put his hands on the top, and drew himself up. He dropped on the farther side softly, and stealthily made his way through the shrubbery into the avenue.

Now that he was within the precincts of the garden, there was nothing visible except the trees and the bushes. Out of the enfolding night issued many voices; a disturbed blackbird clinked in the distance, a dog bayed suddenly, the wind rustled about the avenue, and over all ran the beating of the sea. Neither house nor gate was to be seen from where he stood—the girl had vanished. He moved swiftly but with caution in the direction of the house, and, coming to a pause, thought he detected a stir in the laurels upon the border of the drive. He went toward them on the impulse, but ere he had taken two steps fell into something that crouched by the rhododendrons. A girl's cry rose up and was stifled. Her breath was upon his face.

"Who is it?" he asked quickly. "Is it Lizzie?"

His voice seemed to reassure her, for she struggled no longer, only continued to breathe heavily. She had removed herself out of his grasp, and for a moment there was silence.

"Why did you run after the chaise?" she asked. "I saw it knock you down."

"It was an accident," explained Faversham, gathering together his wits with his growing calmness, "such as my running over you just now, which I regret, my dear."

"You were in the Hall this afternoon to see Sir Piers," she pursued. "I heard you talking."

Faversham considered ere he spoke; he also felt in his pocket. "Who are you, Lizzie?" he asked.

"I am housemaid under Mrs. Hobday," she replied; and asked after a pause, "Are you an enemy to Sir Piers Blakiston? I heard you quarreling."

He seized her hand sharply, and pressed into her palm a guinea. "Tell me, is there anyone staying in the Hall?"

"Yes," she answered, after a momentary pause.

"Who is it?" demanded Faversham, feeling again in his pocket. Lizzie waited; the second guinea was squeezed into her hand.

"'Tis a young lady," she made reply, "that came off a wreck with Sir Piers."

"What's her name?" he persisted. Lizzie in the darkness shook her head. "You must take a message to her from me," he said peremptorily. She hesitated. "Come," he said encouragingly, "your master has gone. It will be safe."

"Mrs. Hobday attends on her herself," she objected. "She is ill, and has rooms in the tower."

"You must take a message," declared Faversham, with abrupt decision, and there was the clink of another

guinea on its fellows. Apparently this was a successful appeal, for she began to go cautiously toward the house, and he followed her. She led the way to a side door, from which steps descended in a sweep upon the lawn, and, opening this, which had evidently served to let her out upon a truant's errand, beckoned him noiselessly in.

"You may stay in this room," she whispered, "if you make no noise. No one comes here; this side of the house is never used. What message shall I take?"

"Say that Lieutenant Faversham is below, and waits Miss Garraway's commands, anxious only if he can be of any service to her."

Lizzie repeated the words, and then left him in the dark and empty chamber. He had his own thoughts and fears and emotions for company. It was, of course, possible that this girl from the wreck was someone other than Barbara, in which case he would know it from the way in which she received his message. On the other hand, he had practically no doubt that it was Barbara, and if that was so, how would she answer him? That depended—it depended on——

The thought was too terrible for him. Was he here to rescue an innocent and virgin creature, or was he here only to take vengeance? He dared not say even to himself, but waited, miserable and impatient, anxious for the girl's return, and yet full of dread as to what that return would bring to him.

How long he waited he could not guess, but the time seemed interminable. No sound reached him from the house, and no light was visible. He pushed open the door at last, and looked down the narrow passage. Far

away he perceived a glimmer of light, as it were a suppressed glow, which evidently came from a candle; and after a moment or two of hesitation he began to feel his way toward it, groping along the wall on one side. The candle hung, as he found, in an octagonal lantern, which swung from a low groined archway, and from here two corridors ran in different directions. Once more he hesitated, not knowing if it was wiser to go back and keep his watch again, or to risk all and push on. He decided on the latter course, and, choosing a corridor at random, he plunged into the labyrinths of the house. A staircase rising on his left tempted him presently, and he mounted it, landing in a corridor above. At the end of this, which was ill lit but bore signs of habitation, he came to a long window, which stood open. Putting out his head, he peered into the night and listened. A light shone some way to his right, and by it he could make out against the blackness of the sky the square tower of which the maid had spoken. The light gleamed from a window in the tower, and there lay—Barbara? With a new incentive not to lose heart, he went forward again. He had roughly committed to memory the bearings of the tower, and keeping his direction ever toward it, he passed by passages and stairways at last out upon a landing with windows. He looked out, and to his satisfaction perceived the black bulk of the tower looming over him. A door faced him. He went to it, and knocked, his heart thumping in his side. As he did so a hand was laid on him, and a voice cried in concern:

"You cannot go in there, sir. What are you doing here?"

Faversham turned on his heel and confronted the housekeeper. She was pale with agitation, but looked formidable.

"What are you doing here?" she repeated. "These are a lady's rooms."

"I know it," said Gilbert curtly, "that is why I am here," and he turned and knocked louder. The agitation had betrayed her where her anger alone would not have done so.

"You must not enter," cried the woman. "'Tis a sick lady in bed——"

In answer he turned the handle, without awaiting any response to his knock, and the door giving, pushed it ajar and went in. The room in which he found himself was commodious and well furnished, indicating itself by many marks as the boudoir of a woman. A door stood open into a farther room, and in this a light burned besides the two upon the table in the first chamber. The noise of his entrance drew a cry from the bedroom, and in another instant Barbara stood in the doorway, Barbara clad in a white negligee, and pale as her gown.

She stood staring at him, and next, with a little cry and a swift passage of her feet, had run toward him.

"Gilbert—Mr. Faversham!" She seized his hand. "Oh, you are here to help me! I am glad to see you. How came you here? I—I have been ill."

"It is true," said the housekeeper from behind him. "She has been ill since she was rescued by Sir Piers."

Faversham's eyes devoured her. She had taken on a more ethereal and spiritual aspect since he had seen her last. Did that etherealization come of trouble? Was it

through martyrdom that the poor saint had reached her sanctity?

"Why are you not at home, Barbara?" he asked simply. "What are you doing here?"

She threw up her arms with a gesture of weariness. "I am only a woman. What can I do against a man? I am a prisoner."

The words were ominous, but he said stoutly, "You are not a prisoner. You are free to go, and you shall go this moment with me."

She looked at him listlessly. "Yes, I suppose so—I will go with you. Yet what's the difference? I change one man for another. A man is a man," and she laughed unpleasantly.

Gilbert's heart trembled. She spoke like one demented.

"You must not talk so," he said reprovingly. "You must come home with me. Your mother is waiting anxiously for news of you. She thinks you are dead."

"Poor mother!" sighed Barbara, and shrugged her shoulders as if impatient of her sigh.

"Has that man kept you prisoner?" he asked, hoarse now with his anger at the treachery of Sir Piers.

"Oh, he was good and kind," she answered indifferently. "They have made much of me. I believe, Mr. Faversham, they have quite spoiled me," and she laughed again in her unpleasant manner. "But I could not get out. I was warned by Sir Piers that I could not get out. Yes, I will come with you to my mother—poor mother; but men are all alike. I hate the name of man."

"What did he keep you here for?" said Gilbert, in his voice of emotion.

"He wants me to marry him," said Barbara, in her dull, even voice. "He told me I should not go forth until I should marry him."

It must be confessed that this answer startled the young man. It was by no means what he had expected —and feared; and now that he had it, he was inclined to fear it as much as that which he had expected. He spoke with angry vehemence, visiting upon the empty air the violence of his wrath against the baronet.

"You shall go forth free; you shall not marry him!" he cried; and then was aware swiftly that Sir Piers himself was within the room.

He stood with his hand on the door, surveying them with interest, but with no surprise nor any alarm, and it was he, not Faversham, who broke the silence.

"If I had known, Mr. Faversham, that you proposed to be my guest, I would have taken steps to receive you in a becoming way—as far, of course, as is possible in these barbarian wastes," he added, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Faversham broke out, "You are all cheat and liar, sir, and even when your treachery is unmasked you have not the grace to blush."

"Treachery!" said Sir Piers, and signed to the housekeeper to withdraw. "Will you allow me to sit down, Miss Garraway? I must apologize profoundly for trespassing on your privacy so unexpectedly, but I heard voices, and took alarm for your safety. One never knows

in these outlandish parts with what treatment one may meet—what risks one may run."

Barbara said nothing, but shrugged her shoulders and eyed him curiously, not with dislike or even suspicion, but with the expression with which one might watch through the bars a strange creature in its cage.

"You have kidnaped this lady, and held her prisoner," said Faversham, controlling himself to put his formidable indictment in words. "You have insulted her foully, and you have lied to cover your cowardice and brutality."

"Come, lieutenant, if I may still so call you," said Sir Piers smoothly, "we go too fast. My head will not follow your quicker wits. We began with treachery, and we have rushed on to—to the other things." He waved his white hand. "No doubt you will be good enough to repeat them to me presently, one by one. Treachery! Is it treachery to yourself of which you speak? Or treachery to this lady, who is engaged to be my wife?"

"It is a lie," said Gilbert.

"You have an indelicate rude tongue, sir," protested Sir Piers. "Is it not so, Barbara? I regret to bring you into our boisterous talk, but Lieutenant Faversham had doubted my word. Is it not true that you consented to be my wife?"

"It is true," said Barbara dryly.

"If Mr. Faversham doubts any longer, I have a most excellent witness in a certain royal person, who did me the honor to be present at the betrothal."

Barbara burst out laughing. The man was irresistible, and she had no fear of him. She was almost really

amused. But her laughter startled Faversham, in whose mind once more grave and terrible doubts began to spread. Yet he did not wince.

"I am taking Miss Garraway to her home at once," he declared, "and will return to settle with you."

"Is it true, Barbara? Are you going home?" asked Sir Piers mildly. "Mr. Faversham will excuse me for doubting him in my turn, and you, I trust, child, for this wearisome catechism."

She looked him in the face fully. "If you have any objection to raise, of course—" she began, with irony.

He shook his head. "You know, child, I would do only what is best for you. But you have an obstinate will. I am not yet certain I know you, Barbara. And I suppose if you go you will not come back? No. Then I must come to you."

For the first time a look of fear flashed in her face.

"Oh, you will go back to town and pleasure," she said scornfully.

Sir Piers glanced at her sadly. "You have played the very mischief with my life these last months, child, and after all you do not know your strength. You repudiate the engagement?"

"I do," she said boldly.

"This is in Mr. Faversham's presence. It may interest him," said Sir Piers. "Mr. Faversham, you are privileged to behold a suitor who has been played fast and loose with. Barbara, I will not let you off."

She flushed with anger, and made a gesture of contempt and scorn, at which Faversham, who had been amazed and bewildered by the talk, fired once more.

"You will have to answer to me for your ill-treatment of Miss Garraway, sir," said he, with simple dignity. "In the meantime, I have assured her that I will protect her."

Sir Piers blinked with amusement on him. "You seem, Mr. Lieutenant," he said, "to misinterpret strangely. You have been witness to Miss Garraway's withdrawal, and consequently to my humiliation. No man likes another to see him in so contumelious a position. Imagine me, then, in the dust, but I beg you will be the kinder to me, at least the more considerate, in that I am so reduced and so bespattered. Barbara, is it your wish that this gentleman should protect you from me?"

"I can protect myself," she burst forth. "I am not afraid of you, although you think I am."

"Dear child, that I never thought," he said tenderly. "You baffled me. I could never measure, but I never underestimated your courage, believe me. Mr. Faversham," he went on blandly, "this dear lady has doubtless acquainted you that she has been kept captive here since yesterday morning. Hence you are vowing vengeance like a proper knight errant. But she wants you not, and greatly as I respect your motives, neither do I. I beg you will go, and whatsoever may be between us may remain over till a more convenient time."

"I will not go without Miss Garraway," declared Gilbert, looking at her.

She stood, straight and tall and white in her gown; the color had clean gone from her face once more, and she looked at neither.

"Barbara, will you go with him?" asked Sir Piers's beautiful voice.

"Yes," she said, very plump and abrupt.

"Then, child, I will ask Mrs. Hobday to attend you," said the baronet, suave and unmoved. "There will be much to be done ere you can leave." He pulled out his watch and examined it. "'Tis past nine some time, but you can hire a boat for Lymington, I doubt not. My chaise will be here within half an hour. I left it to go forward, having changed my mind as to my journey, Mr. Faversham. But you shall set forth by ten at the latest, I am sure."

He looked at them, and Faversham, who was beginning to feel a certain fear of this smooth-tongued man, threw him back defiance. Barbara shuddered, and sank into a chair.

"I will not cross to-night," she said, with a sob. "I hate the Solent. I will stay here."

Faversham went forward to her in his impulsive way as if he would soothe her, but was arrested by a sharp voice of command. "Do not touch her," it said, and, turning, he saw a glitter in the usually cool eyes. "Miss Garraway is in no need of your assistance, Mr. Faversham," Sir Piers proceeded more mildly; "she shall have Mrs. Hobday."

As he spoke he rang the bell, and the housekeeper, who had evidently been in waiting, appeared at once, and received her instructions. Then Sir Piers turned to the younger man.

"You have your answer now, sir," he said. "Are you content?"

But being by this time beyond his own control, out flashed poor Faversham. "Sir, I will send you to hell, for a consummate hypocrite and villain," he declared.

"You shall have your chance, boy," returned Sir Piers, and then in another tone, "Great God, d'ye suppose I would surrender her to a country bumpkin?"

"You shall answer for that as for everything—lies, treachery, and all," was Faversham's sharp return.

Sir Piers shrugged his shoulders again. "My friend, or my enemy rather, those things of which you speak," he said, "are but counters. Are you so young as to weigh such counters against a woman, even though they spell hell? I prefer heaven to-day and now."

They passed out, but on the threshold Sir Piers stopped and turned toward the girl.

"Barbara," he said, and she looked up, "Barbara," and he made a step into the room again; "you are foolish, Barbara. You have no more sense than a pretty bird. Will you marry me?"

"No," she said bluntly.

He took her hands, and she did not resist. "Look in my face," he said, and she did so, defiantly, angrily. "Good God, child, you should know better," he said, with a sudden breaking of his words, and left her abruptly. But Barbara sat and stared at the closed door, her lips moving and a pucker of doubt on her forehead.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT AWAITED FAVERSHAM AT DESNEY

Sir Piers descended the stairs and led the way through the maze of corridors, with the lieutenant of foot at his heels; but no word passed between them until they reached the hall. Here Faversham, halting, turned on the other.

"You have had your way," he said fiercely. "You have ruined her reputation, and you shall die for it."

"Pardon me, you are too imaginative, Mr. Faversham," answered Sir Piers coldly. "I pick up, greatly to my own satisfaction, the daughter of an old acquaintance, who has been blown out to sea in a gale of more than ordinary violence. Happily, we are not far from my house at Daxter, where the young lady receives every attention and care from my comfortable and motherly housekeeper. As soon as she is fully recovered," he added, "no doubt she will pack off home. Possibly that will be to-morrow."

"You are a devil!" exclaimed the young man.

"Mr. Faversham," said Sir Piers, with asperity, "as we are agreed that we are to settle all this on a future occasion, where is the manners of heaping up the provocation? You can only die one death. I beg you to be economical of abuse. And besides, let me ask you to look at it in this light. You have endeavored, since I had the honor of encountering you this afternoon, con-

tinuously to smirch a lady's name, and she one you profess to admire and esteem. Fortunately, there is none to hear these ridiculous calumnies, or perhaps I should say innuendoes, save myself. But it is the principle, sir, it is the principle. I would do my best to believe the best of any friend, to say nothing of one to whom I was more warmly attached."

"I do not understand you, sir," stammered poor Faversham.

"Your insinuations, sir, against me convey insinuations against Miss Garraway," said the baronet, with dignity. "To charge me as you have done is to demean her."

"She told me she was your prisoner," said angry Gilbert.

"Mr. Faversham, I make excuses. Your journey and your excitement—but I beg you will correct that idea. Ask Miss Garraway, and see if she will confirm you."

Upon that they parted, the one as outwardly calm as the other was hot and turbulent. Faversham, indeed, slept ill, and was at the gates early next morning. So greatly did he dread and dislike Sir Piers, that he still expected a ruse and that he should be tricked again. But there was no opposition to his entrance, and (what is more) he found Barbara in the hall, prepared for her journey.

Before the doors waited the chaise, and Sir Piers himself superintended the arrangements for the departure. He greeted Faversham ceremoniously, and displayed all the time a tender care for Barbara's comfort. She must

have everything possible to carry her on her way, and the housekeeper, Lizzie, and the gardener were brought into requisition to that end. Lizzie, it was noticeable, avoided the young man as far as was possible, although she had no need of her alarm, having already passed completely out of his impulsive head. He was awkward in his manner, but resolute. He was carrying home a lamb rescued from the wolves, and yet somehow Barbara had not the air of a lamb. On the contrary, she was quite mistress of herself, and showed a face of cold pride. The mildness of the lamb was rather manifest in Sir Piers's manner and tone. He persistently called her Barbara, and his voice was very musical. The sound of her own name came as a revelation to the girl from his lips.

"You will be comfortable, child, I think. Mrs. Hobday, I want that scarf. There is a sharp air abroad, Barbara, and you will be sitting still. Besides, there is the sea passage."

He handed her into the chaise with his most elaborate manner, and turned and looked at Gilbert.

"I hope, sir," said he, "that you will take every care of this lady who is intrusted to you. You guard a precious jewel."

Faversham flushed with annoyance, but made no answer, and Sir Piers leaned forward to the chaise.

"I will come for you, Barbara," said he, and touched her fingers with his lips.

"You will go back to London," she said coldly.

He shook his head, smiling. "Child, I will come for you."

"You will lose your pains," she said abruptly. "I wish you good-by and farewell."

"*Au revoir*, Barbara," he said, and with that the chaise moved off.

As soon as they were quit of Daxter, and were on the road into the hills, she turned to her companion, and broke the silence.

"You are very good, Mr. Faversham—you are very kind. I owe you a deep debt."

"Barbara," he burst forth, unable to contain himself any longer, "you owe me nothing. There is nothing I would not do for you, and yet you would owe me nothing still. That is my privilege, that is my pleasure. Dear, that is the very essence of my being."

"You are kind," she repeated, and turning, looked out of the window. The early sun was on the bay, and from innumerable ripples the light flashed back as from ten thousand mirrors. Barbara took a draft of the fine air and felt exhilarated by the fair prospect. Unaccountably that smiling sea moved her, so that she who had broken into tears at the thought of crossing overnight now thrilled at the blue field of moving water. She fell into her own thoughts for some time, and Faversham respected her silence, glad merely to have her in the chaise with him, rejoicing in her safety, and touched with delicious satisfaction at her proximity. He had witnessed her parting with Sir Piers with content; it pleased him to see that treacherous baronet receive the glove in his face, even although he did not seem to be aware of the blow. There was evidently a mystery about the betrothal, which he had no doubt Barbara

would clear up; but as he had heard her definitely refuse Sir Piers, he was not greatly concerned.

He had deep faith; where he gave his loyalty he remained loyal; and, his dark fears dispersed like the miasma of a nightmare, his heart rose like a lark and sang in the early morning.

But he was not destined to continue his day so happily as he had begun it. After her meditation, Barbara was pleasant enough, but more distant than he in his warmth of affection desired. It was true that he had not quite settled in his mind how they stood to each other. It could not be said that they were engaged, but their relations had moved a long way upon that road. He had her promise given as he went off to join his regiment, and he had her letter of appeal, which, surely, if ever document did, breathed their mutual tenderness. She would have written to none but her promised husband in such terms and with such frankness. And here he was now escorting her home to her mother. Under whose care should she travel save under that of her affianced husband? But Barbara had not considered their relations one jot or tittle. She had gone through much, endured much, and learned much since she had left Moyden for town, and she was, as it dawned on him gradually, a very different girl. She spoke a good deal, and made inquiries with real interest in her voice.

"I want to hear how you found me," she said, and invited him to the narration. He told of his visit to Lady Marston's, of his clew in Winchester, and again at Lyndhurst, and finally came to his discovery at Beaulieu.

"Yes," she assented frankly, and stared at the sea. "'Twas the man that Sir Piers took. They saved my life." And while he was unwillingly silent under this statement, added pensively, "He must have bribed my maid, or mamma would have heard before you told her. She was always a shifty woman."

He would have liked and expected to recognize in her voice and face some spirit of fire and passion in speaking of one so foul and deeds so evil; but he was unable to trace anything except a calm recognition of facts in her manner. Barbara puzzled him, and he grew less comfortable, his sense of triumph faded. This was certainly not the girl he had loved in the Forest. She was even more beautiful and attractive in some ways, but she was different. Nor did his uneasiness abate when, just before they reached Moyden, she turned on him with an astounding proposition.

"Mr. Faversham, I should not like my mother to be distressed by all this story. We must not tell her everything."

"But—but—" he began.

"You have told her something, and I must fall in with that and add my own tale. But we must not let her know the truth."

"You mean," he said bluntly, "that you would keep Sir Piers's name out.

She colored faintly, and set her lips. "Yes," she said, "it comes to that. She thinks very highly of him, and I would not discover him in his true light. He is not as high-minded a gentleman as she supposes. It would grieve her."

"High-minded!" blurted forth the honest lieutenant. "He is a damned villain!"

Barbara's color increased, and she averted her head, but he had the singular impression that she bit her lips in annoyance. No doubt it was stupid of him and ungenerous to open old sores and remind her of the insult which had been offered. He was penitent instantly, but shrank from offering an apology, which might only, by reaffirming a fact, intensify her pain. He cursed his uncouthness, but it was she who referred to the matter.

"Sir Piers has wronged me deeply, I will admit," she said, still with averted head. "He is a man of wayward impulse and a masterful will. He is accustomed to consider only himself, which is good for no man. But I do not see that it is necessary to reveal his conduct to my mother, however dishonorable. We are done with him."

It was almost with a sigh of relief that Faversham heard her conclude on this sharp sentence, but he asked with some awkwardness and diffidence:

"But you must say what kept you. Your mother will ask why you did not come. You will have to tell her that you were imprisoned——"

To his amazement, she shot him a quick look, in which surprise was blended with hauteur. "Imprisoned!" she echoed. "Indeed, Mr. Faversham, if you had any realization of what I had gone through in that desperate voyage, you would marvel that I am able to depart so soon. 'Twas no question of imprisonment."

Poor Faversham's heart sank; he could make noth-

ing of her; and, to crown his distress, he recalled Sir Piers's smiling suggestion that he should see if Miss Garraway would confirm him in his theory as to her detention. And yet Barbara herself had declared that she had been held captive? Was he to appeal from herself to herself? Had she been hysterical? What was the explanation of the riddle? The more he thought the farther was he from any reasonable solution; and when they entered Moyden gates, so far from feeling elated at his success in returning to the tragic mother her lost daughter, he was sensible only of failure, of wretchedness and doubt, and of the disagreeable duty of lying.

Mrs. Garraway's welcome was diffused with tears. She embraced her daughter many times, and was garrulous with her affection; and in her warmth included Faversham as the heroic savior. Her thoughts dwelling on highwaymen and gypsies, had anticipated Barbara as a poor, pale body of death in cerements, and here was she in radiant life, and beautiful as ever. She shook Gilbert's hand again and again, and took him to her motherly bosom, as if he had been a son; after which, quieting, she proceeded to practical questions. It was this that Faversham dreaded, in view of the orders he had received. What was he to say?

"You shall tell me all about it," she said, wiping her eyes. "What happened to you, Barbara? And where did you find her, Gilbert?

Faversham reddened, hesitated, and looked helplessly at the girl, who changed neither expression nor color.

"I had a terrible adventure with highwaymen, mamma," she said, without any signals of embarrassment. "Mr. Faversham tells me you have heard something of that; but you cannot guess all. I have gone through dreadful experiences."

"Poor child, poor child!" said the mother, soothing her, "and was it Sir Piers rescued you? Mr. Faversham declares it was Sir Piers rescued you."

"Madam, I said—" began Gilbert, but was silenced by a flash from Barbara.

"Sir Piers!" she echoed, in astonishment. "Indeed, mamma, as you shall hear, it is scarcely to be called a rescue, since I was out of the frying pan into the fire. The gentleman who came up and put to flight the gypsies proved a greater villain than they." She looked across her mother's shoulder at the satisfaction in Faversham's face.

"Heavens!" cried Mrs. Garraway, holding up her hands.

"Yes, mamma," pursued Barbara, "for he was bent on abducting me, and would have succeeded, for I was near fainting from fatigue and distress, but that I took refuge in a boat, and was taken out to sea."

"A boat!" cried the shrewd lady. "Bless me, what did you in a boat? I thought you was in a chaise, child."

Faversham trembled, but Barbara did not falter.

"So I was, mamma," she said coolly, "but the wretch, instead of driving me to Moyden in my unconscious state, took me to another house by the sea. Conceive my position, mamma," she said, with some emotion,

"at the mercy of that villain, who was bent on my ruin. What could I do? I was all alone, but I had still my hands and my feet at my service. Do you wonder that I took advantage of the first scheme of escape that occurred, and committed myself to the care and kindness of the deep? 'Twas kinder than man, mamma," and a genuine sob broke her voice.

Behind Mrs. Garraway, Faversham's face expressed in every feature a lively sympathy, together with satisfaction that the villain was figuring properly in the narrative. Barbara's eyes met his again.

"And I was blown out into the night," said she, with coolness quite recovered, "and would have perished miserably had not Sir Piers Blakiston rescued me."

"Sir Piers!" exclaimed Mrs. Garraway, in surprise, and then a broad smile stole over her face. Poor Faversham, his countenance fallen and blank, uttered something inarticulate and choked on it. Barbara's eyes over her mother's shoulders forbade and commanded him. He was silent, and Mrs. Garraway, wreathed in smiles, continued:

"Gracious, my dear, how exceeding kind of Sir Piers! And that he should be there, too! We are deeply indebted to him. I will write and thank him. It was the providence of Heaven he was there. Strange, is it not, Mr. Faversham, how the dispensations of Providence fall out?"

"It is very strange, madam," said Faversham, in a hard, dry voice.

"I remember that you had not a good opinion of Sir Piers," proceeded the lady; "you had some amazing

and improper suspicions. I hope you are convinced now. La, my dear, what do you suppose? Mr. Faversham said you had written him the strangest letter about Sir Piers."

"Did he?" said Barbara haughtily. "Mr. Faversham presumes to read too much into my letters. If I had thought he could be so foolish as to misunderstand, I would never have written. I have not been always pleased with Sir Piers," and she threw him a defiant look, leaving, as it were, the explanation of the riddle at that. It sufficed for Mrs. Garraway, who beamed.

"Ah, there's town ways and country ways, Barbara, and I dare say you were strange to much that is usual in London. It is well known, or was in my young days, that gentlemen are pressing. They push too fast sometimes. 'Tis their idea of gallantry, my dear, and I fear they go far to embarrass a maid's modesty. Yet 'tis only the way of the sex—is it not so, Mr. Faversham?"

"Madam—I—I am not acquainted with London ways," stammered the unfortunate young man.

Mrs. Garraway nodded approvingly, for here was ingenuous youth acknowledging its limitations. But Barbara spoke decisively.

"And it is a good thing not to be acquainted," she said. "There is no good to be learned in London, and a great deal of evil."

"Barbara!" exclaimed her mother, in a tone of censure; but Barbara was rebellious, and veering as swiftly on a new course, was so amiable and friendly to Faversham that his spirits rose fast in the warmth of her con-

descension. She called him Gilbert, and begged her mother to thank him for his services in bringing her home.

"Which I have done," said Mrs. Garraway briskly, "though I regret having troubled Mr. Faversham in the matter, seeing that Sir Piers would have seen you home in safety. It is strange he should have been there. It was the hand of Providence."

"His estate lies in those parts of the Island," said Barbara, brusquely for so sweet a nature.

"Ah, to be sure," acquiesced her mother, who was taken up with her own thoughts, and bridled at them still. "No doubt Sir Piers will come over and pay us a visit, to see you are no worse."

"No; he will go to town," said Barbara; but in her own heart she doubted. She turned again to Faversham.

"How is your mamma?" she asked, with sweet graciousness. "I fear I forgot to ask before."

"I—I have not seen her—I have not been home," he stammered.

Barbara gazed at him, realizing now that there was some puzzle in the situation which she had not anticipated. He had not been home to see that mother to whom he was devoted! And how came he here at all? But these were questions that must not be put in Mrs. Garraway's presence, for they involved the famous letter written from Lady Marston's. She saw now that Gilbert had been curiously reticent, and had offered very few explanations.

"You will see her to-night?" she asked.

"I am going now," he said, and bade the ladies farewell.

The shafts of her lovely eyes threw him into a state of ecstasy, so tender were they and so full of invitation. He walked to Brockenhurst in a pleasant mood of wonder and anxiety and anticipation. In his excitement, he had forgotten to obtain a horse at Moyden, and resolved to secure one at the Rose and Crown. The afternoon had slipped by very easily while he was at Moyden, for was he not in the presence of the woman he loved? And now the shadows were gathering and absorbing the landscape in dusk. He met no one until he reached the village, where he called up his old friend, the hostler, by a peal on the stable bell. There was in the man's air something of constraint, though he prepared a horse readily enough. But Gilbert, centered in his dreams and hopes, noticed nothing. The hostler fastened his gaze on the lieutenant's battered uniform, and screwed up his mouth, but said nothing. Faversham, in the saddle, sent him a genial good-by and was turning his horse from the yard, when the man, as if acting on an impulse, put a hand on the bridle.

"Mr. Gilbert," he said, lowering his voice, "it be right you should know there was someone inquiring for you to-day."

"Who was that?" asked Faversham cheerily.

The other approached nearer. "'Twas a party from London," he said, dropping his voice still lower, "as was directed from Winchester and had come by Lyndhurst."

He spoke significantly.

"Oh!" says Faversham, his thoughts flying involuntarily to Sir Piers. But Sir Piers was in the Island.

"Soldiers!" whispered the hostler impressively.

And in that instant Gilbert Faversham remembered and knew—remembered where he stood and what he had done, and knew what that portended and whither it led. He sat silent, and the man watched him in silence; and at last he spoke.

"What do you know of them?" he asked, in a voice that was not certain of itself, but yet was under control.

"The sergeant had a talk with me, sir," said the hostler, "and asked to be directed to Ringwood, wanted to know where Mr. Faversham's place stood, and whether Mr. Faversham was at home. I, smelling something from their coats, says no, he wasn't; and if they liked to ride to Ringwood, no doubt they'd find where Mr. Faversham's house was."

"That is not enough, Bates," said Faversham hoarsely. "You know more than that."

"Well, sir, begging pardon, I had a glass of ale with one of the men while they were waiting, and what he says to me, sir, was that they were here—like—saving your presence, sir—which I mean——"

"To arrest me, Bates," said Gilbert Faversham bluntly.

"Precisely, sir," said the respectful Bates. "And what I mean is, sir, if I may take the liberty, that they went this morning toward Ringwood, and maybe will be——"

"At Desney by now, awaiting me," said the young man, with a short laugh. "I think you're right, Bates,

thank you. I will remember. It was good of you to warn me."

He nodded and put his heels to the animal, who, responsive to the touch of an admirable horseman, fell into a trot and left the hostler staring after them through the dusk.

Lieutenant Gilbert Faversham set his face for Ringwood. Now that the sense of his position had come home upon him in a tide, his instinct was at once for the simplest and clearest solution. He had deserted his regiment in circumstances of special stress; he would now return and give himself up. It was with these considerations in his mind that he rode toward Ringwood. The night air was brisk and stimulating, and in that familiar course he went by the accustomed landmarks in a pleasant dream. The delight of that parting with Barbara overpowered for him still all else. Under the first shock of the hostler's news, which, of course, he should have realized and anticipated, he had staggered; but it was an easy matter to pick up one's principles, and see what was right. He must surrender himself, and no doubt there was a grave charge to be faced; but what chagrin or what disconsolate thoughts could endure in the presence of a high and living love? Barbara's smile traveled with him through the Forest, lighting up the dark silences, and casting glory upon the future. They were done with this abominable beau of London, and life was laid before them in a very pleasant prospect.

The late summer, in its decline toward the stiller autumn, was very quiet in the woods. He heard the stir of the stoat in the blackberry bushes, and owls called

out of the distance. His companion was the rising moon, which struck shadows across his path, and shone out of the blue dark sea of heaven.

The tender hopes that accompanied him did not leave him until he had approached the very gates of his own property. All was as it should be. The lodge keeper opened to him, with a salute and a welcoming smile, as of one who greets an esteemed master back from the wars. He rode down the avenue toward the house full of his folly, and wondering on the surprise his mother would receive. And then all of a sudden the truth emerged and stared on him pitilessly.

Before him lay what? If he could credit the friendly hostler, the soldiers were searching for him, and were to arrest him on the charge of desertion. He could not deny the accusation; and the end was—death. The thought of that cold, dishonored fate brought the sweat to his forehead. He reined in the horse. Were they lying at the house in waiting? Nay, surely his lodge keeper would have warned him. But it might be that the errand was not known, for who could suppose that a Faversham would desert his regiment on the eve of battle? For the first time his offense appeared to Gilbert in its naked sincerity, and assumed monstrous proportions. What had he done, if not to commit himself forever to the ranks of the cowards?

He moved on again, irresolute, and he was still in a mood of doubt and horror when he reached the house. No strange glances met him in the stables, where the groom gave him a respectful welcome; it was when he crossed the threshold that he encountered his blow. His

mother rose up from her seat in the broad hall, and came forward to him.

"I have waited, Gilbert," she said, without emotion in her voice. "I knew you would come. I have been here ever since I heard. You are sought for, for desertion. Is this true?"

"It is true, mother," he said, in a low voice.

She kissed him on the cheek, and drew back. She was a tall woman of more than fifty, even gaunt in her figure, and of cold, deliberating eyes. But he was her only child, and she had spent her life in a struggle between her natural fondness and her sense of duty.

"Why did you do it?" she asked, and even now her voice was matter of fact.

She looked him over, and the lights in the hall fell on the stained regimentals, which betrayed him.

"Mother," said he, breaking down before the calm, incurious question, "I fought at Flushing. None has ever called me a coward."

"I asked you why?" she said, in her formal tones.

"I will tell you, mother, but not now," he answered in distress. "I have deserted, but I am not a coward."

"Flushing was taken by the Earl of Chatham yesterday," said Mrs. Faversham in her level voice, "and my son was not there. My son had run away in the night."

"Mother," said Gilbert, with emotion, for there was a tie of strong affection between them, "Mother, do you think me a coward?"

"There is an order for my son's arrest shown me this day," she answered. "I replied that my son was

at the front, fighting for his country. They told me he had deserted. If your father had lived he would have risen and struck the speaker in the face. But he is long dead, thank God! I had nothing to say, but I waited here."

He made no reply, but his wretchedness was apparent on his face.

"Where are they?" he asked presently, in a blank voice.

"They are in the village," she answered. "They will be here again to-night," and as he made no comment, "Gilbert, Gilbert, have you nothing to tell me?"

She spoke for the first time with an appeal in her tones, and he faltered, but recovered himself with an effort.

"I have not soiled my honor," he said slowly. "But I have ruined my life, and killed you."

"Yes, you have killed me," she said quietly, and turned away.

Outside there was a noise of horses and the trampling of feet. The mother started.

"You must go," she said.

"I will not go," he answered.

"Gilbert, go," she urged. "There is time still; the back way is open."

"If they accuse me of cowardice, let them take me," he answered defiantly.

Mrs. Faversham went to him, and put a hand on his shoulder. "My son," she said, "you will not tell me. No Faversham has ever been guilty of dishonor. What am I to think? But no Faversham shall die igno-

miniously. Do you think I do not understand what this means? Go—and God forgive you. I will not see your face again."

He cast a glance at her of extreme misery, in which struggled a doubt, a hesitation, but at length he turned away.

"You shall not be asked to undergo that," he said, in a low voice. "I will go," and he moved toward the back of the hall. Without, the sound of horsemen was louder. At the door he paused. "Mother," he said.

"Good-by," she said mechanically. He hesitated still, and then, as the bell pealed through the house, passed through the door and was gone. Mrs. Faversham made a step toward the spot from which he had vanished.

"Gilbert!" she cried, and, turning her face toward the hall door, ceased. A man-servant entered from the rear. "Open the door, please," she said, in her usual calm voice.

CHAPTER XX

THE REACTION

GILBERT FAVERSHAM reached the stables, and threw the saddle on his favorite horse. The groom was not there, and he did not stop to light the lantern. He knew that he had but a few minutes, for even if his mother should delay the soldiers, that respite would, of necessity, be brief. It was, indeed, probable that the innocent gatekeeper had acquainted them with the fact that his master had returned, in which case the hunt would go forward at once. At the stable door he paused to listen, with the bridle on his arm. It was certain if they had any suspicion of his presence that they had left guards to watch the gate. He could not venture that way. There remained the outlet on the fields at the back. He mounted and turned the horse upon the path that led through the garden behind. At the bottom of this was a small gate which gave access to a meadow, and beyond that again rose a wooded hill. The darkness had gathered and was deep between the trees, but he knew every foot of the garden and steered between the flower-beds and by the rhododendrons and lilacs, the hoofs of the horse now falling dead upon the turf. Halfway to the little gate he heard voices behind him, and presently one was raised in a tone of command. They had discovered his escape, then, and were already in pursuit!

As this thought passed through his mind his horse came to with a jerk, there was an exclamation in front of him, and he perceived looming black in the gloom a man on horseback. At once he knew that this must be a watcher who had been stationed in the rear of the house, and upon that clapped his heels to the flanks of his animal, and darted across the lawn.

The man raised a cry, and a succession of cries was discharged upon the air. Near the house broke out a light, and he had a passing glimpse of men running in confusion. The next moment, under the impulse of his spur and rein, the horse had gathered together and risen for a jump across the garden wall into the meadow. There was no time to find the gate. Laurels and laurustinus formed the hedge along the wall, and on the topmost branches the horse kicked and plunged clumsily downward, but righted himself as he fell, and galloped across the soft turf for the hill. The night was alive now with the sounds of the pursuit, and more than one of the troop had found his way into the meadow. At this juncture the moon unhappily emerged from the shadows and shone forth, discovering the fugitive in the distance, mounting the rise. Shouts were raised, and the stream of the pursuit flowed toward him.

Faversham had thundered across the meadow and was making for the shelter of the wood, because on either side of him there was no outlet to the road, field after field reaching onward, defined and defended by thick hedges of quickset. Had the night remained dark he could not have doubted the issue for a moment, but the moon, flooding the scene, had offered him as a mark to

his hunters. There was no track from the meadow up the rise, but he cared not for tracks where everything was so familiar, and was soon plunged among the trees, lost to sight if not to hearing. The foremost of the pursuers, however, was not far behind, and burst recklessly through the juniper bushes that lined the way into the wood. Gilbert's horse could be heard breaking through the tangle ahead, and, his path prepared by the former passage, the sergeant of the troop pushed swiftly forward. In that underworld of darkling forest the light of the moon dwindled, and while the one man went by instinct, the other was obliged to go by his ears. The curtain seemed to have shut down on those two, leaving them to work out alone the destiny of the drama. The hill now began to go down. Faversham recognized in the faint light the red boles of the firs which marked the summit, and here, too, the path was easier, and less cumbered by undergrowth. There were two tracks descending, one upon the river, and the other upon an outlying lane, yet they were both crossed so intricately and often by other tracks that it was hard to keep to either, even if it were happily struck, upon a dark night. But he must make his choice, and that he did, with scarce a momentary halt. The river lay on the left, and he pushed with as little noise as possible toward the right. Above him now, upon that crown of the hill which he had just left he heard the horse of his pursuer, among the cracking branches. It was ridiculous, when he came to think of it, that if they had both been afoot they would have gone the faster. But although for a moment there entered into his mind the thought of abandoning

his horse, he soon dismissed it, for, once beyond the wood and in the roads, he would be dependent on the fleetness of the animal. The sounds of their mutual progress reached each man, the lieutenant and the sergeant, and the latter was guided in his pursuit, as much as was the former warned of his pursuer. Suddenly, however, Faversham pulled in, brought his horse to a dead stop, and listened. The track had widened here, and emerged upon a little open space of grass between heavy trees. Darkness was opaque here, and in the deeper shadows of the undergrowing bush nothing was visible but blackness. The noise of the sergeant came down to his ears, and, with a quick inspiration, derived he knew not whence, Faversham drew back into the cover of the bushes, and was still. He could still hear the man descending clumsily, and then, as if by an instant conspiracy, the noise died away, and there was silence.

The night was unbroken by any irruptions; the sticks and branches of the trees had settled back into their places; the leaves were quiet, and there was not even the sound of the wind in the forest. To Faversham in his hiding-place, his own breathing was audible, and he strained his ears anxiously for any witnesses to the soldier's proximity. He had not gone—he was still there; he had come to a pause even as Faversham himself had paused, and they stood now within earshot of each other, waiting. When the quarry moved and betrayed himself the hound also would move. Faversham made no sign.

He had remained motionless for ten minutes or more, and was on the point of giving up the plan of eluding his man in this way, when he was aware of a black figure

moving stealthily in the pathway. The moon had come out again in heaven, illuminating the opener parts of the wood, and threw up before his eyes that shadow which seemed to creep and peer upon his tracks. If it came to close quarters now the affair would be removed from the sphere of posse and fugitive, and would come to the bare test of arms. It would be man against man. Faversham felt at his side for a weapon, and drew shorter breaths.

The figure had its face to the ground, and presently would discover the horse's hoofmarks. Faversham edged gently back into the bushes and awaited the inevitable.

As he did so he was conscious that the leafage was closing about him. The horse backed noiselessly, and the soft leaves rustled only very faintly as they brushed against his flanks, and settled down again. The moonlight seemed to be increasing, and Faversham shrank from the scrutiny of the importunate rays. In another moment surely the figure would look up and discover him. The screen of leaves closed about him, and he cast a glance backward. Behind him the moon was lying silver-blue upon a grass track through the wood!

This discovery stung him to a new resolution. He dismissed all thought of combat forthwith, and, disengaging his horse softly from the bushes, moved without sound upon the new path. He could not guess whither it led, but it sufficed for the present for his needs, and (what was more) the hoofs of his horse fell with little or no noise on the turf, as he went at a foot pace carefully away from the center of peril. He had gone fifty yards or more very slowly, and was debating with him-

self if he might not now with safety break into a trot, when he was startled by a cry behind, and, involuntarily stirring his horse into a quicker pace, he looked round. The moon shone on the sergeant, now mounted and broken out of the very bushes which he had himself used as a shelter. The track was fairly clear between the thickets on either hand, and Faversham's horse mounted to a canter. But the soldier behind was whipping his animal recklessly to a gallop, and was calling on the lieutenant to surrender.

"Surrender, or I fire."

"Fire and be damned," growled Gilbert Faversham in his heart, which was now leaping with the excitement of the chase. He exhorted his horse with heel and voice, bending low on the neck, and a pistol ball whistled in the trees.

"May he be hanged, but he will give the others notice of us," said Faversham savagely, and rode harder than ever.

The way was downward, on a slight declivity, but the pace at which they thundered was dangerous in that twilight. The low-growing branch of a tree, a tangle of creepers, or a rabbit hole would suffice to send horse and man headlong, an accident which at that speed would have been fatal. The sergeant rode with the greatest hardihood, for he had the advantage of passing over ground already tried and proved by the man he was chasing; and before many minutes had elapsed he had drawn appreciably nearer. Certain reflections flitted through Faversham's mind with the sharpness of lightning. If he reached the lane safely it was a matter of

A cry broke from him involuntarily.

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endurance on the part of the horse, and he could pin his trust on his own high-mettled animal. But which way did the track lie? He could not conjecture, and was obliged to increase his pace every minute in order to keep his distance from the enemy. But now the tall trees ended and the track ran out into a more open shelving country, full of dwarf bushes and juniper, and brier and blackberry. What was this place? Faversham, streaming along in the silver light, worked and strained his memory. Everything was unfamiliar somehow in this light and in these dramatic circumstances. He saw before him among the throng of low-lying bushes a thin, tall tree, waving in the night air; it wavered and leaned forward as if it stooped to look on something. Suddenly Faversham recognized it. It was a landmark, and it marked the borders of the quarry!

A cry broke from him involuntarily. His horse, reined back by a hand that scarce knew what it did, reared on its hind legs, and then plunged to the side; its flanks ground on the thorns of the blackberry bushes, and with a snort of pain, it darted forward on its new course. He had been within ten yards of the quarry with its silver, beckoning birch. Behind, the horse of the cavalryman, stretched to its utmost on that easy sward, had gained twenty yards or more in that instant, and as Faversham swerved and swept about into his pace again at right angles, was almost on top of him. The sergeant tugged at his reins when he was aware of the maneuver, but his horse had gathered full speed. He plunged, threw up his head, struck the bushes which concealed that terrible pit, forged through them, and, his

hoofs dragging on the turf, rolled forward with a dreadful squeal, and pitched into the void. The silver birch waved and nodded and stooped gracefully toward the precipice.

Gilbert Faversham, on reaching the lane at the back of the wood and the hill, found that he was not followed, and thenceforward proceeded more deliberately, but still with great caution. He had plenty to occupy his thoughts, which were scarcely of a pleasant character. His mother's distress and his own impetuous temperament had decided him to fly, and this committed him to a course which he would have avoided had he been left to himself. But it was done, the die was cast, and he was an outlaw, unless he liked to surrender himself even now. This idea, however, he put away from him, and contemplated the immediate future anxiously. His was not the nature to look far ahead, yet even his impulsive mind turned aside with a shudder from what lay beyond, in that ultimate distance which, though he might not anticipate, he must inevitably reach. To secure himself against capture was his present duty, as he conceived it, and to that end he composed himself. He knew the Forest as a native, and every road, drove, and village in it. He would seek refuge, then, for that night at least, and none should run the fox to earth. As he turned his horse's head northward, and dismissed that topic from his mind, there came to him at once the memory and the intoxication of Barbara. He was a hunted man, no doubt a price would be on his head to-morrow, he had no roof to cover him, and only the variable and treacherous night for his house; yet he could

have sung as he trotted north—his heart was so deeply moved and his affection so greatly thrilled. Barbara had smiled on him. She was done with that traitor Blakiston, and in her strange, sweet, woman's way had turned to him. The vista was a vista broken by no brooding fears and interrupted by no anxieties for the future. It was in a dream of pure romance he lived as he rode north.

About eleven Gilbert Faversham pulled in before a small tavern, set in the heart of the Forest, frequented by charcoal burners and visited by travelers on the way between Ringwood and the northern parts of the country. Here he was unknown, but even if he had been known, there was no great love between the law and those poor denizens of the woodland. Gypsies wandered here and stole, and peasants earned a wretched livelihood in sundry precarious callings. They collected the acorns of the Forest, and now and then, in addition to their regular work, lent a hand in the innumerable smuggling ventures which centered about the seaboard. Faversham slept soundly that night, untroubled by his position, and haunted by visions of Barbara.

Sir Piers Blakiston, left in Daxter to himself, began his preparations very leisurely for departure. No sooner was the chaise in which he had dispatched the couple back from Yarmouth, than he issued his orders, and early in the afternoon himself set out upon his journey. He made the passage to Lymington very pleasantly, and drove thence to his old quarters at the Rose and Crown. Some enemy, or cynic at least, had said of Sir Piers that

he regarded shame as a form of cowardice, "and you would as lief expect shame in Blakiston," said the wit, "as to find a brave man running away." Sir Piers did not run away. He had threatened Barbara to return, and here he was again, with all his old arrogance, with all his old insolence, and with all his old contempt of situations; and particularly with all his old strength of will. Barbara would not have slept so well that night in Moyden Manor had she known how near he lay to her secure and comfortable home; nor would poor Gilbert Faversham's head have settled so easily in the pillow had he guessed at his rival's design. But nothing could ruffle Sir Piers's demeanor. Over his modest breakfast he questioned the innkeeper, heard in mysterious tones of the posse which was searching for young Mr. Faversham, and of his amazing offense, and ordered a chaise quite early in the morning. He lost no time in showing his hand, and was at the gates of the Manor before midday.

Mrs. Garraway received him with emotion, and exhibited a mixture of pride and reserve and appreciation in equal parts. She had her thanks to express, in which performance she figured with dignity, as one whom emotion has touched to deep issues.

"'Twas God's providence, Sir Piers," she repeated, finding comfort in the phrase which she had never tired of reiterating since her daughter had told her story.

"If God would be so kind to me often—" said he, and left his elaborate compliment in the air. He would stay to dinner, and made Mrs. Garraway the most civil speech in answer to her fluttered invitation.

It appeared that he had carried to London and back

again memories of her wonderful housewifery and amazing dishes. Mrs. Garraway bridled at the flattery, and was beginning to offer a select miscellany from her cupboards and cellars for Sir Piers to take with him to town, when Barbara appeared, fresh from the garden and the moor. Color flooded her face momentarily and then receded, leaving her pale.

"You see, Miss Barbara," said Sir Piers, "I am as good as my word. I am come as I threatened."

"It is good of you to be interested in us," she said coldly.

"I hope you're now quite recovered from the effects of the water," he went on amiably. "I think you have the air of a little pallor, but that is all. I hope you are well on the way to recovery."

"And you, sir," said Barbara, looking him full in the face, "you are on your way to town, I assume." She would have liked to throw it into his own phrase and "hope" it; but while she refrained, her eye challenged him and defied him. He had not come upon her in the vigils of the lonely night, but had met her in the young vigor of the morning.

"I shall go to town when I have finished my business here," he answered pleasantly, and Barbara bit her lip and turned sharply away. It had the air of abruptness, even of rudeness, and made Mrs. Garraway frown. She interposed, begging Sir Piers to taste of her new elder wine, which had been kept and matured a twelvemonth.

Sir Piers, who had come prepared for any hazards, and confident of his own power to deal with all circumstances, had at once perceived that Mrs. Garraway was

in ignorance of what had happened. However much she knew, the true story in its integrity had not been revealed to her. He felt that that advantage was worth the fresh experiment in elder wine he was called upon to make. He sat with the antique, long-stemmed glass between his fingers, and smiled at Barbara, as if in answer to her challenging eyes.

"And so, Sir Piers, you will be witnessing all the sights of town soon again," said Mrs. Garraway archly.

"Madam, I would sooner witness the sights of the country," he said gallantly. "You shall not be rid of me yet."

"Indeed, I hope you will stay long," declared the hospitable woman.

"A day or two," he said, "a day or two, madam; time to complete my business."

"Ah," says she, "I recall you had business here before, Sir Piers."

"The same business," he replied, "the same business."

Barbara was flushing, and turned quickly. "I do not know how it can be the same business, sir," she said, "since I understood from you in the Island that you had done with that."

"True, Miss Barbara," he acquiesced suavely. "But it has taken another turn, as I think I acquainted you. A business, madam," he said, turning to the widow, "that takes all my time and makes a call upon all my properties."

"We are indebted that you should so honor us, being so busy as you are," protested the innocent lady.

"To sit in this company and drink of this wine—" said Sir Piers, in his best manner. Barbara shrugged her shoulders.

"You will be sitting presently with His Royal Highness," said Mrs. Garraway, with dignified appreciation, and broke off quickly. "Barbara, you saw the Prince, child. What was he like?"

"He was a stout, plain, elderly gentleman," said Barbara slowly.

Her mother held up her hands in horror. "Gracious, child, what a way to speak!" she cried. "You are a foolish girl with no taste. I have heard His Royal Highness always described as a handsome man. Is't not so, Sir Piers?"

"I think, madam, Miss Garraway may not have seen him close. He is said to improve upon a near acquaintance."

The unobtrusive smile might have signified anything; as a matter of fact, it signaled a desire that Barbara should appreciate the cynicism of his intervention; but, however she read it, it enraged her.

"I have seen him quite close, sir," she said, eyeing him calmly. "I have seen him as near as I see you."

"Indeed," said Sir Piers. "Then you are to be congratulated, Miss Garraway, as a loyal subject. But," he added, with his eye upon her, "maybe it was not light—maybe it was too dusk to see his handsome points?"

If he expected she would have quailed before his sinister reference he was mistaken in her spirit. Once more her cheeks flamed. "'Twas as you say, dusk," she said boldly. "It happened one day when I accompanied

Lady Marston to her perfumer's. I was left alone temporarily, and while I was in the room a gentleman entered and offered me a gross insult—a gross insult," she repeated, raising her voice and darting a scornful look at Sir Piers.

"Heavens!" cried her mother.

"From which lamentable situation the entrance of His Royal Highness saved me. And it is all that I am likely to benefit at the Prince's hands," she ended sharply.

"I hope the villain was punished," said Mrs. Garraway, all militant virtue. Sir Piers was regarding the girl with an expression of interest.

"He went scot-free," she said, with some vehemence of tone. "'Tis the London way."

"Your father would have killed him," declared militant virtue, still in the stirrups.

"Madam, I can assure you," said Sir Piers earnestly, "that the man would have died had I known all that now I know."

"But he was known—he must have been known. What was his name?" demanded Mrs. Garraway.

"He was a gentleman of repute and standing," said Barbara, keeping her eye on the baronet.

"Gracious mercy! who was it?" repeated her mother.

"Pray tell us who it was," said Sir Piers quietly. "I think this man should be known for what he is, a fool to misconceive you, Barbara, a villain to annoy."

Her name came naturally from his lips, so easily and so naturally that Mrs. Garraway's attention was not called to the unusual mode of address. But it did not

escape the girl's notice. She kept her face toward him for a moment, as if still breathing defiance, and then she dropped her eyes and half turned away.

"I never heard his name," she said dully, "and it is as well. I never wish to hear his name or to see him."

"I should think not," said Mrs. Garraway indignantly, and bustled forward tenderly. "Sir Piers, you will excuse a mother. Child, you did not tell me this. If I had known——"

"I would I had not told you now, mamma," said Barbara, kissing her. "I will tell you nothing more."

Sir Piers looked from one to the other, as a man might who felt he was intruding upon a domestic scene unmeet for publicity. Barbara, having embraced her mother, went toward the door, and met a maid on the threshold. The newcomer was in a state of excitement, and broke forth without ceremony. The soldiers were in Brockenhurst, and were looking for Lieutenant Faversham. The news was all over the countryside, in every wayside inn and by every market-place.

"The soldiers!" exclaimed Mrs. Garraway. "Is it to celebrate the victory?"

The maid did not know whether they wanted Mr. Faversham in order to celebrate the victory, but they wanted him for something.

"They went near to catch him at his house last night," said the maid.

"Catch him! Is he arrested?" asked the bewildered lady; and Barbara stood at the door with a look of interest and doubt and wonder.

The maid explained that Mr. Faversham was not ar-

rested, as far as anyone knew, but had fled, and that a sergeant's body had been found in the quarries by Desney.

"No doubt," interposed Sir Piers suavely, "they will be requiring him to answer a charge of desertion."

"Desertion!" cried Mrs. Garraway, and Barbara was hardly less disconcerted.

"Why," said Sir Piers seriously, "he left his regiment for some reason. I think he had some fears for Miss Garraway. 'Twas his good heart egged him on, poor fellow. But desertion is a military offense, Mrs. Garraway, and may not be overlooked."

"Why, he brought me some cock-and-bull tale," said the lady helplessly, and added feebly, "I should never have thought him a coward."

"He is not a coward," said Barbara quickly.

"No one could accuse Lieutenant Faversham of cowardice," assented Sir Piers, and he smiled. "But of rashness—no doubt he thought Miss Garraway was in trouble."

"His guess was amazingly near the truth," said Barbara.

Sir Piers answered nothing. His pleasant smile, the friendly attitude of her mother, the comfortable aspect of the room which held the three of them, and the sounds of preparation for dinner in the next room—all these things struck Barbara as in strange contrast with the fears and tremors and the dangers of the past. The latter were almost incredible now, and though she could not remember precisely what she had written to Faversham in Flushing, she felt that he had misinterpreted her and

even placed her in a false light. Sir Piers's cynical smile was not only calculated to dispel suspicions, but was even provocative of annoyance and shame. Here was she back in safety, with the man from whom she had fled an honored guest, and her mother bridling and fluttering about him, while Gilbert Faversham was in hiding from the military for having taken a wholly unnecessary journey! His melodramatic fears had brought the situation upon him. It was grotesque; and the real truth was unrealizable while Sir Piers Blakiston, courteous, debonair, and impeccable, stood in that room or sat down to their board. Though Mrs. Garraway lingered on the subject until she had extracted as much information as was possible, and more than was true, Barbara experienced a little impatience with the topic. She shouldered it off. She was sorry for Gilbert, but she was angry that he had made her look like a fool.

"He is too faithful," she cried to herself, and looked across at the man who was not faithful, but persistent.

In the meantime, it had not begun to dawn upon her what this crime of desertion might portend, nor with what penalties it was pregnant.

CHAPTER XXI

SIR PIERS WOOS

WHILE these things passed in Barbara's mind, Gilbert Faversham was being driven from covert to covert through the Forest. The hunt which had begun so tragically went forward with the more zest on the part of those who conceived they had now something to avenge. The fugitive had lain in wait and flung the unfortunate sergeant over the precipice—that this had happened was obvious to the most impartial gossip; for which reason poor Faversham had been hunted out of his retreat on the succeeding afternoon, coming off barely with his liberty. He was now like any high tobyman, as he confessed to himself bitterly, and whoso should shoot or capture him would do the King a service. He saw now how great his mistake had been in that precipitate flight, and began to settle down slowly to despair, and with despair to desperation. The droves and rides of the Forest were many and varied, and these were his home during the day. By night he ventured more than once into inns and cottages in the outlying parts, but his battered uniform and the growing noise of his story rendered these sallies increasingly perilous. Presently, as he felt, the Forest, wide as it was, would prove too small for him, would close in upon him and betray him to the enemy. At times he slept in the open,

under the pines or in the bracken and the heather, and ever his ultimate fate drew nearer and nearer to him. There was no hope to hold it at arm's length much longer.

It chanced that one bright day, about a week after his escape, Faversham had descended eastward, and, driven by the pains of hunger, had made bold to knock on the door of a tavern under a spreading oak. He was made welcome, sat down to food and sound ale, and, to avoid suspicions, if not questions, gave out that he was one of the troop that was exploring the Forest as hounds explore a spinny. Of what had happened, however, he found his host profoundly ignorant, nor did he display any particular interest. He was of opinion that the deserter would be caught, but that Faversham had a hard task before him; and at that his dull eyes lighted on the lieutenant's coat. Faversham, noticing his glance, laughed. "Aye," he said, "'tis no easy work, as you say, in these wild places of the Forest. It is rough and tumble all along, and I am sick of it. We are no nearer than we were a week ago."

"A week!" echoed the host; "have you been at this a week? I suppose you are from Lyndhurst?" he added, still fixing his eye on the uniform.

"Lyndhurst," repeated Faversham.

"Why, there's some soldiers there, they tell me," replied the man. "Come this morning."

"Oh, yes, we are at Lyndhurst," said Gilbert, as indifferently as possible. "That's why I'm here to make inquiries."

But as he ate he reflected that the troop was too close

for comfort, and that it would be wiser for him to return to the more deserted and interior regions of the Forest. The day was hot, however, and he lingered, and he was so tired with the experiences of the past week that, after the innkeeper had left him, he fell asleep in a chair by the window.

The tavern lay a few miles along the high road to Winchester from Lyndhurst, and was an unpretentious affair. Yet it so happened that Sir Piers Blakiston, returning from the former town, discovered that one of his horses went lame, and pulled up his chaise at this very spot. The sound of the carriage, together with the voices on the road, awoke Faversham, and he looked out with the sharp glance of one who has been accustomed to take alarm. Immediately his gaze fell on Sir Piers, and the hot blood which was his heritage from high-spirited ancestors mounted in his face and drummed along his arteries. He pushed open the window wider and stared forth, the prey of a rising fury.

Sir Piers was sitting at his ease in the chaise, awaiting without impatience the issue of the efforts of his man and a boy from the inn to extract a stone from the horse's shoe. Suddenly he felt a tap on his arm, and turning, found himself face to face with Faversham. A light of excitement danced in the lieutenant's eye.

"Sir, I wish a word with you," he said.

Sir Piers looked at him in doubt. Every lineament of his face beaconed what he wanted, and Sir Piers allowed a frown to flit over his countenance as a shadow flits on the water and is gone.

"Good day, Mr. Faversham," he said courteously;

"it seems that we are always meeting unexpectedly, and as if we were always having a few words."

"I would like to recall to you, sir," said Gilbert sharply, "a promise you made me a week or so back. I do not suppose it has escaped your memory even after the lapse of so long a time."

He spoke in a sneer, and Sir Piers's eyes visited him from the crown of his head to his feet, absorbing in detail the disorder and dinginess of his dress.

"I suppose," said Sir Piers deliberately, after his survey, "I suppose it does seem a long time to you, Mr. Faversham. I have known coats last better a whole month, and I am told there are some who can keep 'em a full year in repair, a practice I do not personally favor."

The insolence of his words was not accentuated by his tone, which, as always, was quite civil and suave. Yet it maddened Faversham more than a coarser sneer.

"If you are a gentleman such as you boast yourself, you will come out of the chaise and speak with me," he said, controlling himself by a severe effort.

Sir Piers shrugged his shoulders. "You have me at a disadvantage," he answered, preparing to alight. "You appeal to me in a sacred name. People like myself are placed necessarily at a disadvantage, Mr. Faversham," he continued, stepping down, "by having to respond to that appeal——"

"It is obvious that you would find it inconvenient," interrupted Faversham, with elaborate irony.

"From persons like yourself," went on the baronet, calm and unheeding. "You will easily understand that

the odds are all against us if we can make no reciprocal appeal."

"I understand you," said Faversham, coolly now, "and I dare say we shall manage to settle everything between us comfortably," with which he turned and led the way toward the tavern.

A little orchard of trees and late summer flowers lay at the back of the inn, and hither Faversham directed his steps and those of his companion, who stopped more than once in his passage along the garden path, to admire the hollyhocks and the dahlias and to inhale the fragrance of the stocks. Faversham came to a pause by a tiny rustic arbor, the work of rough hands and rude art, but prettily grown with creepers.

"You know why I have brought you here," he said abruptly.

"My dear lieutenant," said Sir Piers pleasantly, "I fancy it is with the idea of killing me, which, despite the fact that I have just made my will and ordered my affairs, does not (I will confess it frankly) fall in with my wishes. I am not yet too old, you see, to enjoy life. In another ten years, say, I might welcome your attentions, if I could persuade you to call again, so to speak. His Royal Highness is quite ten years my senior, and he does not flag."

"Sir Piers Blakiston," said the young man, quite coolly still, "I should like you to give your attention to the situation, which is serious enough. Your wit and your sarcasm may keep till another occasion. They do not touch me now. I have brought you here to answer to a different charge altogether, and that I explained

to you when we met in the Island yonder. I do not suppose that you wish me to repeat it. I think, indeed, it would be unseemly, as there is no need to name names."

"I think, Mr. Faversham, that we have got beyond scruples about names at this point of time," replied Sir Piers gravely, "but you are right in supposing that I desire no reminder. Indeed, your amazing and intolerable conduct is in my mind now."

"Then we are quite agreed, sir," said Faversham grimly.

Sir Piers made a gesture of dissent. "My good sir," he answered, "there is such a thing as form and order. I may be stupid, but I confess I see not how you are going to educe these out of the present circumstances. I admit that I have committed myself to meet you, which for my own sake I regret" (a sardonic smile played on Faversham's face), "inasmuch as I do not wish to have on my conscience the death or injury of a young man whom I believe to be, from some points of view, quite estimable. But there it stands, lieutenant, if I may continue to call you so, and I will redeem that promise at the first fitting opportunity, which I cannot think this," he added, with a quizzical smile.

"It is my opportunity," said Faversham simply, "and I may never have another."

"I condole with you," replied Sir Piers, "but I cannot see that it alters my case. I did not consent to a conflict which has the appearance of a common and vulgar quarrel. If I am to meet you, it shall be according to the proper rules of the *duello*. I am speaking very plain, sir."

"I am acting plain," retorted Faversham. "You have a pistol, sir, and I have mine. We will stand at twenty paces."

"Really, my good young gentleman," protested Sir Piers, "I believe you are mad. Do you know that at twenty paces I shall blow a hole in your heart, and Heaven knows what misunderstandings may arise, as we have no witnesses. I protest I would sooner lose a hundred guineas at faro than go through the experience."

"You shall not overreach me with your mincing ways," said Faversham, breaking out with an oath; "you must stand here and face me."

"Again," said Sir Piers, with a gesture of weariness, "again you embarrass me by your appeal. I have no option, but I declare it is assassination, and I have never yet assassinated anyone. You will, at least, permit me to secure the attendance of my man. I am not used to be seconded by valets, but if you will have it—and maybe the stableboy may not be too frightened to offer you the same offices."

Faversham said nothing, but even into his angry soul the desirability of having witnesses penetrated. He had his hand on his pistol, and he kept it there while Sir Piers walked down the little pathway and vanished among the trees. Somehow it did not enter his head that his foe might not return, but might take advantage of the chaise, which must be by now awaiting his appearance. The house shut off the orchard from the road, and Faversham waited by the arbor. It could not have been three minutes before Sir Piers came into

sight again, followed by his coachman and the stableboy. These very ceremoniously he introduced to Faversham.

"An honest man, John Grove, as I understand, by name, and a youth, with an excellent craft at horses, as I can bear witness, Edward Edge. I will give you the choice, Mr. Faversham."

"You are making a mock of this matter," cried Gilbert, with passion. "I must ask you to remember it is serious, and to dispense with these buffooneries."

Sir Piers raised his hand. "I declare, Mr. Faversham, that I have never encountered anything so ridiculous in my life," he said. "I know no other way to treat it. If you were content to wait——"

"I will not wait. I accept your witnesses," cried Faversham.

Sir Piers cast an eye across the orchard toward the road, and then toward the stables, which lay some fifty paces away.

"If I am not mistaken, sir, you came riding," he said.

"What of that, sir?" demanded Faversham.

"Why, Mr. Lieutenant, only this, that I think you should go riding."

"I do not know what you mean," said Faversham angrily.

The coachman and the stableboy stood apart; Sir Piers approached nearer to his rival. "Mr. Faversham, what uniform do you still wear? His Majesty's, eh? Well, outside in the road you will find that uniform represented also, and in some force."

Gilbert Faversham uttered an exclamation. "Treachery!" he said. Sir Piers shook his head.

"I shall never make you understand the difference between a gentleman and a—and others," he said equably. "I gathered from a brief conversation with the leader, and the triumphant air of someone else, that your landlord——"

"Damn him!" ejaculated Faversham.

"He had his suspicions of you," said Sir Piers, with a look askance at the tattered clothes. "They have come from Lyndhurst, and, thanks to me, believe you in the tavern still. I am only suggesting——"

Faversham turned away impatiently. "You have the better of me," he said, with a gesture of impotent anger.

"Your horse is there—there is a lane at the back," pursued Sir Piers. "If I might advise——"

"I thank you for your warning," said Faversham, interrupting, "but I need no advice, sir."

"I'm afraid our little affair must wait," said Sir Piers.

Faversham made no answer. He had the horse out of the stable, and was mounting. Sir Piers watched him with interest.

"Help the gentleman to mount, Edward Edge," he said in a voice of command to the stableboy, who hurried forward to obey. Faversham shook him off impatiently, and turned his horse to the back of the orchard.

"Open the gate for the gentleman, John Grove," ordered the baronet.

Faversham looked around and saluted. There was a noise from the house, which attracted his attention, but the green of the trees hid them from the road. Sir Piers returned his salute gravely.

"Time presses, Mr. Faversham," he said, and also cast a glance through the orchard.

Faversham's gesture as he struck his horse and passed out into the lane was eloquent of despair and resignation. Fortune had intervened even on his vengeance. He was an outlaw, who had lost all, even his right of honest anger. He disappeared from view to the accompaniment of these bitter thoughts.

Sir Piers, having deftly disposed of the soldiery, mounted his carriage and was driven to Brockenhurst. He could not be bothered with Mr. Faversham, and had welcomed the advent of the posse as the easiest way out of his difficulty. As he now went southward he heard the hoofs of the horses beating the road as the troop wheeled upon Faversham's track, and he dismissed the lieutenant from his mind. He was occupied by a far more important matter, which centered about Barbara. On reaching the Rose and Crown he made a change in his dress, and after a little delay proceeded to Moyden. During the week he had not been inactive. The girl had displayed no overt antagonism to him after the first day, and Mrs. Garraway was more than friendly. He had made up his mind to conquer, and he had put up with the deficiencies of the rustic inn with that express purpose. Barbara's mind it would have been hard to analyze, nor would she have attempted the task. She had come to accept Sir Piers's presence there as she had

accepted it on his first visit, before her father died. What had happened seemed very far away, and, moreover, it must not be denied that she experienced some pride and satisfaction in having brought about so great a revolution in the man. That satisfaction her feminine vanity could not resist, and she was inclined to be the kinder to him because of it. Of Gilbert she had not thought much, but was aware that he was still at large, and vaguely believed that all would go well, and that, like a brave rebel, he would in time make his terms with the enemy. She lived too intimately in her immediate emotions to achieve any perspective, and her wayward nature drew a certain pleasure out of hanging on the brink of doubt and irresolution, with the knowledge that she could decide one way or another in a moment. The question which occupied Sir Piers concerned her decision, and he had come back from Winchester fully determined to force it. The mere resistance which he encountered in her, coupled with the bold way in which she faced facts, had exercised upon him an increasing fascination. With the experience of him which Barbara had, many a girl would have fled from him, and again many would have forgiven and succumbed to his position and person. But this girl did neither, being cool enough to hold him off at the same time that she refused to visit his offenses with feminine hysteria. He recognized in her attitude a cynical indifference which was worthy of a man, or at least of a woman of the world. He had not expected it in one so young, so handsome, and so clean of mind. Mere youth had few attractions for him, but to Barbara's charm of personality he had wholly surrendered,

and his infatuation must be measured by the point to which he had gone. He had stepped across the border of doubt at Daxter, and, oddly enough, had not reconsidered his determination. He had undergone no disillusion such as he was wont to experience out of a long acquaintance with affairs of the heart. Indeed, it seemed to him that he would be content to install this girl in his London house and to share with her in the good of life till the end. It was a queerly sentimental point of view for Beau Blakiston, and one which he himself would have ridiculed in another; but after all, it is given to very few, if to any in this world, to be set apart from human weaknesses, particularly upon the sexual side. Sir Piers was carried away as he had not been for nearly twenty years; that was the plain truth, and there was nothing more to say.

Sir Piers had an invitation to sup at Moyden, but he arrived there some time before he was due. Mrs. Garraway was absent upon duties connected with the farm, and it was Barbara who received him. At first, it is true, she sent down word that her mother would be back presently, but almost immediately upon top of that message, and while the servant was returning with a request from the visitor, she changed her mind and descended. Clad in blue, and very delicate of feature, but with a strong and willful eye, Barbara greeted him coldly. She enraptured Sir Piers, who, finding his glass, surveyed her with the liveliest signs of appreciation. The act had a certain familiarity which she recognized, and which he had intended her to recognize, but which did not ruffle her.

"You are amazingly beautiful, child," he said, and dropped his glass and sighed.

"My mother will not be back for half an hour," she said, paying his compliment no heed.

"I shall look forward to seeing her," he said abstractedly. "But in the meantime—in the meantime——"

In the perceptible pause she intervened. "I hope I shall do for a stop-gap," she said, smiling.

He did not smile. "Barbara," he said gravely, "I think we have been too long beating about the bush. We will pretend, if you like, but I am tired of pretense. Think of it, child—for fifteen years or more there has been nothing but pretense. You see how frank I am. I have pretended to quarrel, pretended to like, pretended to hate, pretended to be jealous, pretended to love. Perhaps the worst pretense of all is to pretend that others don't know you are pretending, even while your manner makes it obvious. It is the pretense of pretense which is the last straw in one's duty to society."

"You take society duties very seriously, I fear," said Barbara lightly.

"Barbara, if a man is born on a desert island, what has he but the desert? It is a question of habit. Give him something else, and he will grow into a new habit, if it is in his nature. But pity the poor wretch on the desert island! His stomach may be full, his bed may be down, and he may walk among diamond mines daily; but—he is on the island. Custom, my dear, grows a mask on one. You see my face. Do you suppose that it signifies what I feel? No, I lost that sincerity in

childhood. If you would know the truth, you must go deeper."

"I have no desire, sir, to know any more. I am not curious, and, besides, by this I have learned as much of you as is convenient."

Sir Piers lifted his face, as if she had struck him. "You shall say what you like," he said, "but you shall learn more, and what you shall learn hereafter shall be nothing but pleasant to you."

"I cannot trust the mask of your face," she retorted, "nor the mask that your words are, either. I think I have learned a good deal, though I am still so young."

"Barbara," said he softly, "do you suppose you are right in your attitude? You say you are young, and that is true, so true that it accounts, I think, for your unkindness. I understand all you would say. I have wronged you, I have shamed you, I have insulted you. Yes, that, and a thousand times that I will confess to. But, child, I do not regret it, I glory in it. If you were what I supposed you to be—a facile girl without too much individuality, I would do it again. You were not, and I am chagrined at my blunder, chagrined, too, to have put you in a false position. But I had then and I have now the same object. The same emotion inspires me. I want you, Barbara, and by Heaven I will have you!"

He ceased in a sharp, authoritative note, in which, also, evident passion sounded. Barbara's eyes fell.

"There is no mask here," she said to herself, "no mask at all," and her bosom was agitated by the very violence of his declaration. She went to the window.

"I think you would be better in London," she said.

"I will not go back to London," he said with vehemence, "I will not go without you."

"Then you will never go," she replied.

For answer Sir Piers took a step forward, and came to her side. "I am a willful man," he said. "I have ever been used to have my way, and you baffle me. But I do not think you will baffle me always. I trust your heart, Barbara, rather than your eyes. Oh, they are wild and mettlesome. I would sooner trust to some high-spirited mare than to you. But that is what I like. I don't want to trust you; I want to admire you. Give me yourself, child—let go, and I will catch you. I swear to you that it is sweeter to let go."

"You think," she said, with a little ring of scorn to disguise how much she was moved by this proud man, "You think I am clinging desperately lest I should be carried away by my feeling for you! Oh, but I know you."

He took her hand. "No, you do not," he said firmly, "and you do not know yourself. You have as little knowledge of what it is in you to be or do as any girl at school. It pleases you to think that you know the world because you have seen a fragment of it, and that you know your own nature because you have realized one particular part of it. Believe me, dear child, you cannot fathom a woman's nature until you are a woman, and that you are not—only a beautiful, alluring girl, only a girl with the promise of all things."

"And one who loves you, I suppose?" she breathed rather than spoke.

He turned her face to the light of the empty sky, and in the twilight scrutinized it. "I do not know," he said slowly. "I think so. I cannot tell. You are a riddle to me yet. I hope so. But I shall know to-night."

"You shall know now," returned Barbara, braver in her words than in her spirit. "I do not."

"Is it so?" he asked, and the fire blazed in his eyes, so that she shrank from him. "Is it so, dear? I'll not believe it. By Heaven, I'll not! Give me your hand, and tell me that. Give me your face—child, do not wrestle with me, but lay bare your own soul and see!"

He held her in his grasp, and his face, aflame, and miraculously changed, was within a few inches of hers. The command of his gaze, which had always had an influence upon her, held her rigid. She did not wince, indeed was conscious only of a curious glow that warmed her through, and did not frighten. And so they stood for some thirty seconds of time; and then there was a noise at the door, and turning swiftly, they perceived in the dusk the hare in that game that was being played across the Forest, the hare, Lieutenant Gilbert Faversham, dusty, dingy, worn, and stained, and wearing a haggard look of despair.

CHAPTER XXII

BARBARA'S CHAMBER

FAVERSHAM, escaping from the tavern in the afternoon, had gone once more into the recesses of the Forest for refuge, but found himself headed off by a detachment from the particular place he aimed at. Therefore, leaving this he turned back and went south, going by the deep woods and droves of Lyndhurst toward the Queen's Bower. He had in his mind at last the counsels of despair, for, realizing that there was no hope to hide much longer in the Forest, he had resolved to try and escape to sea from Lymington or some other place of vantage on the Channel. And, this settled, his thoughts swung at once toward Barbara. He was very near Boldre, and if he adventured to Lymington he must go nearer still. His heart longed to see her and to feast upon her beauty, to receive perchance some tender word of affection, all the more that if he succeeded in his design he must say farewell to England for years, if not forever. He made a tour, avoiding Brockenhurst, and steered his way in the gloaming to Moyden, in time to come upon the scene described in the last chapter. The outer door had been ajar, and, as he did not court publicity, he made no scruple of entering without notice. Drawn by the sound of voices, he had drifted down the hall, until he had been arrested by Barbara's tones, and entered the room in which she had received Sir Piers.

At sight of the intruder, Barbara drew herself away from Sir Piers and uttered a cry. It was in part a cry of alarm, and in part of astonishment. She had recognized him, but how strange he looked! How wild his air was, and how uncouth his appearance! Blakiston made no remark that was audible, but stood very still and erect, watching out of eyes that were growing cold like embers from which all fire is fleeting.

"I must beg your pardon, Miss Garraway," said Faversham at last, in an unnatural voice. "I was in search of Mrs. Garraway, and, attracted by voices, was misled into an untimely interruption."

"It is of no consequence, Mr. Faversham," she answered coolly, though her face burned. "You are always welcome. My mother will be here presently."

There was an awkward silence, which Sir Piers made no effort to break. He was still contemplating the young man.

"Now that I am here, however," said Faversham, turning to him and seeming to gather confidence in the antagonism of those eyes, "I have something which I should like to say to this gentleman."

"You must not quarrel," put in Barbara quickly. "You are strangely wild, Mr. Faversham. What is the matter? I—I do not recognize you in this character."

"I must beg your pardon," he said again; "these are not clothes in which to appear in a drawing-room or in decent company. I am not fit for decent company any longer. I am aware of that. But my excuses must be that a man who has been in hiding for a week is not in a position to be decent"—he cast a glance of contempt

at the baronet—" much less a dandy. But I will not interrupt you long. I would only ask Sir Piers Blakiston to give me a few minutes' conversation alone."

" We had, Mr. Faversham, more than a few minutes' conversation this afternoon," replied Sir Piers.

Barbara started.

" This afternoon! You met Mr. Faversham! Then is it settled? You have arranged it with your regiment? "

She spoke eagerly, and as obviously with sincerity. She had imagined that the matter could be settled in that simple way! and he was face to face once more with the astonishing mind of woman. Well, it released her from a heavy charge of callousness, but not the heaviest of deceit. Had he not seen her in Sir Piers's arms?

" No," he answered bitterly. " Things are not arranged that way, Miss Garraway, as Sir Piers Blakiston could have told you, if you or he had been interested."

" You did not tell me you had met Mr. Faversham," said Barbara, turning sharply on Sir Piers.

" No, I did not," he answered mildly, " yet I intended to do so, and might in all likelihood be doing so now, if Mr. Faversham had not anticipated me by his timely appearance. I am glad I was by an accident able to be of service to Mr. Faversham in warning him of the proximity of his enemies."

" Is that so? " said Barbara, with parted lips and a look of excitement.

" It is so," said Faversham, with a gesture of contempt, and he addressed Sir Piers, " Sir, I have not had your answer."

"If I may be spared, Miss Garraway"—said the baronet.

But she had taken alarm at the mutual attitude of the two men, and saw in their manner some frightening secret. She was certain they suppressed something, and being now recovered from her original confusion, her spirit rose to challenge them.

"You shall not go," she said, with authority. "You shall not quarrel, Gilbert. You must give me your word that you will not quarrel, Sir Piers."

Sir Piers elevated his eyebrows.

"My dear lady, I will confess the position is ridiculous, even theatrical, but *que voulez vous?* I am not in control. You must ask Mr. Faversham. I believe he is taking me aside to thank me."

"Mr. Faversham?" she said, with a fine air of appeal, which, however, did not touch him.

"Miss Garraway, I beg you will not think I trespassed on you wantonly," he said coldly. "Sir Piers Blakiston, may I ask your attendance?"

Barbara's eyes flashed. Her spirit, if wayward, was as strong as his.

"I forbid you, Mr. Faversham, to quarrel on my account," she said decisively. "I will not have it. You shall not bring my name into your quarrels," and she was now of a very menacing face, and very beautiful to behold.

Gilbert Faversham gave vent to a little bitter laugh.

"I do not know when I may believe you," he said abruptly. "You blow hot and cold, Miss Garraway. You veer about like a weathercock. I know nothing of

women at all, I suppose, and I fail to understand you." He looked at his rival, and his anger gathered, gathered also to see her standing in authority over him, forbidding him and ordering his movements.

"This man," he said, pointing a finger at Sir Piers, "has persecuted you, and yet I find you here with him on friendly terms, let us say. Good Heaven, Miss Garraway, do you remember how you wrote to me, a little time back, and what wrongs you have received from him? It is incredible. You play fast and loose, not only with men's lives and hearts, but with your own faith and sincerity. I cannot tell which was the true woman, the woman whose letter I have here, or she whom I surprised just now unintentionally. Indeed, I think I knew her at Daxter first, where I had gone to save an unhappy soul, as I thought (poor girl!), or to rescue a body out of death."

"What is't you mean?" panted Barbara.

"When I got your letter I was before Flushing," he pursued, with increasing bitterness that swallowed all else, "and I thought you were in such a plight as to call for aid from me or any man that was a man, whether he loved you or not. We were to assault early in the morning. I asked for leave, and could get none; and when the picture of you unbefriended, betrayed, and persecuted, came before me, I could not bear it—I deserted."

"Gilbert!" she said. A little frown crossed Sir Piers's brow.

"I traced you to the Island slowly, and found into whose hands you had fallen. He lied to me when I faced

him in Daxter and charged him with having abducted you. He said you were not in the house, and had never been. But by chance I discovered that he lied, and I found you. I ask you to recall how you received me, and if I have not reason to think this Barbara Garraway that I see now was there first made known to me. It was then I swore that there was only one end between me and Sir Piers Blakiston, only one for my own sake, if not for yours. Judge you, if I have not a ground of quarrel with this man, and judge you also between yourself and me, if you have used me fairly."

He turned toward the door as he finished, with a look that beckoned Sir Piers after him. But Barbara sprang forward.

"Mr. Faversham, do not go," she said excitedly. "Why did you not tell me this before—oh, why?"

"I did not know that there was any necessity," he replied simply.

"You should, you should," she said impetuously. "Tell me where you are going. What is to happen to you?"

"I am going abroad, Miss Garraway," he answered, now quite calm again.

She turned to the baronet.

"Sir Piers," she said imperiously, "would you be so kind as to leave us for a time? I wish to speak to Mr. Faversham in private."

"I was about to offer that," said Sir Piers, and bowing, left the room.

She approached Gilbert rapidly and put a hand on his arm.

"I want you to understand that I did not know what you have told me, that I did not realize it properly," she said earnestly. "You will believe me, won't you?"

"Yes, I believe you," he answered wearily. What mattered that now that he knew the worst?

"I did not understand properly that you deserted for me, that—that you felt as you did, and—and threw up so much for me, or I would not have written. I was hysterical and foolish."

"Oh, I can see you made a mistake in writing," he replied, and looked away. "We have been at cross purposes, and it was I that was the fool. But you see I took your letter too seriously."

"You do not understand," she persisted. "It was serious, but I was mistaken, I was unwise——"

"I know, I know," he said impatiently, "seeing how things have turned, it was unnecessary."

The pressure of her hand increased on his arm.

"And you will not quarrel with Sir Piers for my sake?" she pleaded.

He started away with an exclamation. He could promise much, but not that—not to pardon a man who had grossly insulted him, and who would be left to enjoy the sweets of her love. The blood receded from his face, but before he could speak Mrs. Garraway entered the room.

"Mr. Faversham!" she called in astonishment, and stopped where she was. Her features assumed a rigidity which was usual to her in displeasure.

"It surprises me, sir, that you have ventured to show yourself here," she went on, "after what is known of

you. I am told you are a deserter, and killed a poor man in the quarry. Your family and mine have been acquainted for generations, but I cannot receive, or allow my daughter to receive, a coward and a murderer!"

"Hush, mamma, you don't know," cried Barbara, in distress.

"Indeed I do," declared Mrs. Garraway, turning indignantly on her daughter. "How dare you, miss, receive him? The soldiers are looking for him everywhere, to arrest him."

"I was going, madam. I am sorry I intruded," said poor Faversham.

"You shall not speak of him so, mamma," cried Barbara, with spirit. "Mr. Faversham is a very generous man who has suffered much from the faults of others."

"Indeed they always say that," said Mrs. Garraway, somewhat staggered by her daughter's impetuosity.

"Yes, it is true," continued Barbara bravely. "It was I for whom he suffered. It is my fault he is in this position."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Garraway helplessly.

"He deserted his regiment because he thought I was in peril," explained Barbara.

"Pooh!" ejaculated her mother, after a pause. "There you've got hold of that silly tale again. Well, Mr. Faversham had best be gone anyway, as there was a troop of horse coming up this way from Brockenhurst just now. I passed them in the chaise."

"You must go, Gilbert; oh, you must go," said Barbara quickly. "If you stay here you may be taken."

"I will go now," said he, and turned to the door. "Miss Garraway, I thank you," he added quietly, and went.

But he did not pass directly from the house. Sir Piers was in the morning room, his back to the door, looking out at the shrubberies in which the dusk was gathering, but he faced about on hearing footsteps.

"I was wondering if I was to see you, Mr. Faversham," he said.

"If you will come forth—the door is open to the lawn," said Gilbert, and indicated the way politely.

The two men emerged upon the gravel walk and took their way through the trees toward the river meadows. It was Sir Piers who broke the silence.

"I need not ask you, Mr. Faversham, if you have fully considered this," he began courteously.

"You need not," replied the younger man bluntly.

There was a pause, and then Sir Piers spoke again.

"I have never met a more obstinate man in my life, nor a more unreasonable," he said emphatically, "and I really believe, Mr. Faversham, that you are going to embarrass me."

"I hope so," said Faversham, and as they had arrived at the place for which he had been steering, he came to a stop. "I have provided myself with pistols," he went on, in a loud voice. "I took the liberty of borrowing a brace from the hall, to which, perhaps, one of us will be good enough to return them presently."

"I begin to think, lieutenant," said Sir Piers, "that I could have made something of you in Society."

"Our business is a duel, sir," said Gilbert curtly.

"Ah, then I shall certainly make something of you," said the baronet cheerfully. "I suppose it is assassination, but you are mad enough to leave me no option. Is it to be twenty paces, sir? You must make haste, if I may make bold to say so, or the night will be upon us, and I shall be safe."

Without reply Faversham measured the paces, and coldly but civilly went through the preliminaries. They stood at the measured distance, the bubbling of the stream in their ears and the descending lights of the sky in their eyes. A robin trilled and warbled from the garden.

"We will take the next note of the robin for a signal," observed Faversham.

"You must think me a deuced honest man," retorted Sir Piers irritably.

The bird raised its voice on the evening air again. A report rang out, and a wreath of smoke streamed out of Faversham's pistol.

"You must practice more, Mr. Lieutenant," said Sir Piers. "Your ball went wide by three inches," and lifting his pistol he threw the barrel lightly into the air and fired at the river indifferently. The blood started into Faversham's head, and he clinched his hand. At that moment out of the dropping darkness issued a voice, and a figure all in white sprang from the copse.

"Mr. Faversham, Mr. Faversham! Oh, how wicked of you both! Who is hurt? Oh, how could you?"

Barbara with bare head was between them, and throwing terrified glances from one to the other.

"We were trying to shoot a robin, Miss Garraway,"

said Sir Piers's suave voice. "You know that robins are great fighters, very quarrelsome fellows, bullies, my dear Miss Garraway, who will give no one rest, and must ruffle it on all occasions. However, he flew away. I may say we both missed." The ironic in his tone was obvious, but Barbara took no heed of that. Assured that no harm had come of the meeting, she went on quickly:

"Mr. Faversham, there is just time. The soldiers are coming up the Chase. They will take you if you are not gone at once."

Gilbert started up suddenly from where he had stood, abashed by her unexpected appearance, and with a hurried "thank you" was halfway across the fields.

"Where are you going?" called Barbara, and the answer came back out of the night:

"For my horse in the stable."

Barbara cried out that it was too late, and that he must go the other way; but her voice did not reach him, being pitched low lest it should carry too far for prudence. Indeed, if she had known it, the troops were nearer than she had supposed, having caught the sound of firearms, and hastened their horses.

Barbara moved in agitation toward the garden, and Sir Piers accompanied her.

"I have no doubt he will escape," said the baronet. "He is an excellent horseman, but a bad shot," he added.

"Oh, he will be taken," said the girl, in distress, "and it was all for me!"

"Barbara!" pleaded Sir Piers. She turned on him.

"Oh, will you be silent?" she cried. "Do you

not see I cannot bear you? I wish I had never seen you."

At the back of the house they came upon a trooper, and fifty yards farther upon another. There were no sounds from the stable. The dark had peopled the lawn with shadows, and by the rhododendrons a stealthy form was creeping. Barbara rushed noiselessly forward.

"Gilbert," she whispered, and the figure stayed.

"I could not reach the stable," he said. "They were posted there, and I crept by the orchard to the lawn. I am going to strike off by the Chase."

"You cannot," she said. "They are there. You must hide in the house. Come with me."

He followed her, as if he had surrendered his right of action and initiation to her; and, indeed, he was feeling so greatly bewildered by the change in her that he had lost some of his old buoyancy of will. They entered by the door through which Sir Piers and Faversham had stolen forth, and the baronet brought up the rear. Had he been visible in the darkness he would have been seen to wear an odd black look foreign to the usual placid suavity of his face. At the foot of the stairs Barbara beckoned Faversham and ushered him up them; a knock at the hall door sent her precipitately forward, and she urged him with entreaties.

"You must hide. They are here. Come with me. I know," and he was carried forward, unable to protest. Barbara swept onward like a rapid, furtive ghost, shining white in the gloom, and he followed. Then she paused before a door and threw it open. "Go in there," she said breathlessly.

He put in his head and withdrew it.

"You cannot see," she said. "I will strike a light," and hastening in before him took a light from the tinder with fluttered fingers. The candle streamed on the blue-walled room and the white curtains of the bed.

"It is your room?" cried Faversham, startled.

"Yes, yes, they won't come here; they won't dare," she said.

"I—I cannot," he said. "If they find me——"

"They won't. You must," she commanded him.

"Barbara!" he cried, moved of a sudden to his reins.

"Yes, yes, quick. You have done more for me. Blow the candle out and hide."

She went out rapidly, and shut the door gently behind her. She waited a moment and saw the glow die out in the cracks and through the keyhole, and then she went downstairs.

Meanwhile a brisk and respectable man of middle age, in uniform, was interviewing an angry lady. He introduced himself as Corporal Master, with a warrant from Mr. Holton, J.P. When Barbara was halfway downstairs she paused and looked down on the group in the hall. Sir Piers stood to one side, seemingly impassive and undisturbed, yet he was aware that she had appeared. Mrs. Garraway was loudly professing her indignation.

"There is no deserter here," she declared. "I do not harbor deserters, corporal."

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," replied the soldier, "but we have heard not five minutes ago that he was seen here."

"Well, he's been gone half an hour. I turned him away," declared Mrs. Garraway, a little taken aback, and repeated, "I do not harbor deserters."

"I have a warrant, and must search, ma'am," persisted the soldier civilly. Mrs. Garraway turned in despair to Sir Piers, and her hope returned.

"Such an indignity shall not be endured by the Garraways," she said. "Sir Piers, you will stop this, will you not? This gentleman, corporal, is Sir Piers Blakiston of Hone, His Royal Highness's most intimate friend."

The corporal saluted, but remained. He was obliged by his duty to search.

"Then Sir Piers shall complain in my behalf to the Prince and His Majesty and Parliament," remarked the mortified lady, "and you shall regret this insult."

The corporal saluted, and gave an order to his men.

"What—what is it you want?" asked a wavering voice from the stair.

The corporal respectfully acknowledged the new arrival, and repeated his statement mechanically.

"Mr. Faversham a deserter!" she said. "There is some mistake. What will you do with him, corporal?"

"Take him to Winchester, ma'am," said the blunt soldier.

"And what then?" she faltered.

With the air of one quoting from a well-known document, Corporal Master repeated, in a loud, expressionless voice:

"All officers and soldiers, who, having received pay, or having been duly enlisted in His Majesty's service,

shall be convicted of having deserted the same, shall suffer death, or such other punishment as by a court-martial shall be inflicted."

At the word "death," on which the corporal's voice rested, Barbara whitened, and put out her arms on each side involuntarily, as though by that act she would bar further progress. It was, however, the work of instinct, not of reason, and, her wits resuming their sway, she let her arms fall and stood motionless. Then she stepped heavily down to the hall. Sir Piers's eyes watched her.

Meanwhile the soldiers, under the direction of their corporal, had begun the search, and were exploring the lower rooms. Sir Piers found himself with Barbara in the morning room.

"He is escaped?" he asked, in a low voice.

"He will not be taken," she returned defiantly.

Sir Piers bowed and said nothing. He knew when to be silent, and he knew, too, that his star was on the wane.

Mrs. Garraway, refusing to be a witness to the indignity put upon her, as if thereby she would become party to it, gave herself the satisfaction of venting her anger on her daughter.

"You encouraged him, Barbara. It is your fault. Why did he come here?"

"He is a very old friend," said Barbara curtly.

"Yes, but not now he has disgraced himself," argued Mrs. Garraway.

"He has not disgraced himself, mamma," said Barbara firmly, and looked at Sir Piers, "and Sir Piers will tell you that, too," she added, with meaning.

"My dear lady," said he, on this unexpected appeal, "if you ask me, I do not think Mr. Faversham capable of disgracing himself, though apparently he has the misfortune of disgracing others."

"There it is, Barbara. Sir Piers sees it," lamented Mrs. Garraway, on hearing this ambiguous reply. "We cannot hold up our heads again after this humiliation. To have common soldiers in the house, turning all things topsy-turvy, and stealing goodness knows what! It is monstrous."

But Barbara paid no heed, for her ears had caught the sound of feet in the hall, and she slipped out of the door in a tremor. The soldiers were mounting the stairs. She followed.

They ransacked several rooms on the first floor, and came soon to the corridor in which Barbara's chamber lay. At the first door she hesitated, and sprang forward.

"It is my boudoir," she said to the corporal. "It is not necessary, but you may enter if you will."

She was aware, as the door opened, of a figure behind her, and vaguely knew that Sir Piers Blakiston had joined her. The corporal and his men made a somewhat perfunctory and embarrassed search, under the eyes of the beautiful mistress of that room.

"There is nothing," she said, with a deep breath, "and now you see how foolish——"

The corporal had paused by a door. "Where does this lead, ma'am?" he asked respectfully.

"You cannot go into my bedroom," said Barbara haughtily, and gained stature before their eyes in her regal pride.

Sir Piers's eyebrows lifted, and then he frowned.

"You must not push the lady's patience too far," he said. "Come, corporal, be content. You have made a thorough search in every possible spot. There is no doubt the man has made his escape good, if he were here at all."

The corporal plainly was shaken; but he was a man of routine, and clung to his sense of duty.

"I beg pardon," he said apologetically, "but I must do my duty, which is to search in all rooms."

"You shall not enter my bedroom," said Barbara, putting herself in his way, and flashing like an angry queen. "It is private to me."

The corporal looked awkward, and glanced from the lady to the baronet, and back again. He received no assistance from the latter. Slowly he produced from his pocket the warrant, and unfolded it. The perusal gave him courage, and he offered it to Sir Piers, as if he would invite him to be reasonable. But Sir Piers waved it aside.

"I have no doubt you are acting on authority as a soldier, corporal," he said, "but as a man you cannot trespass on Miss Garraway's room."

The corporal grew red, and spoke with one of his men.

"If the lady will give us her assurance, sir, that there is no one in there, maybe we might omit this room."

This was the extent of his concession, the compromise between his obedience to authority and manly shame.

Barbara stirred, and parted her lips to speak, but

reading something on that eloquent face, Sir Piers said quickly:

"How can the lady know there is no one in there? How can she give you her assurance? You are none the better for that."

"Then I must search," said the corporal, falling back on mere doggedness.

Barbara darted an angry glance at Sir Piers, as if protesting against his statement, but he met it with mute eyes. He saw that the game was up, if she did not, and his interposition had been for her protection.

The corporal stepped swiftly past Barbara ere she was aware, and turned the handle. The next moment a knot of the troopers surged into the room. Blue and white was its raiment, very dainty and pretty and virginal; and in the center stood a man, on whose countenance, torn with a conflict of shame and confusion, the light of the candles fell.

He was in the hands of the soldiers in a moment, but Barbara's voice stayed them, ringing loud and agitated through the room.

"That is not the man—that is not Mr. Faversham."

The corporal turned to her, staring.

"I did not want you to find him," she said swiftly, ardently, and with a gasp. "He was hiding in my room, but it's not Mr. Faversham. I have known him all his life. But this gentleman is—I did not want you to enter because he was here."

Sir Piers's eyes flashed, and he brought his elegant fist down on the table by which he stood with a little thump.

"Great God!" he muttered to himself, "she has ruined all—she has thrown herself away! She is mad."

The corporal stared harder than ever, and turned to the baronet.

"Is this Mr. Faversham, sir?" he asked.

"My good man," replied Sir Piers grimly, "I cannot be expected to know every deserter in England. I know nothing of him; but he is evidently a friend of Miss Garraway's."

The solution of the scene, however, was near enough, for Gilbert, mechanically delivering the pistol to the corporal, said simply:

"I am Gilbert Faversham. Miss Garraway is mistaken."

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW FAVERSHAM WAS WELCOMED HOME

It was more than three weeks after Gilbert Faversham's arrest that Mrs. Garraway was amazed and delighted to receive an unexpected visit from Major Harry Miles. Those three weeks had been filled with melancholy events and bitter memories. Mrs. Garraway had not been witness to the astonishing scene in her daughter's bedchamber, but she became soon acquainted with the dreadful scandal which rumor brought to her ears. The report of what had happened spread abroad in the district and grew in spreading, till Barbara's fair name was threatened and actually tarnished. The good lady flew into a passion of resentment when she had wind of it, which was not lessened by the sudden desertion of Sir Piers Blakiston.

Sir Piers drove in his chaise to Moyden on the day following the arrest and, very debonair and grand and mighty civil, begged to be allowed to pay his respects to Mrs. Garraway and Miss Garraway. Miss Garraway was not visible, but her mother appeared, a harassed, friendly face. Sir Piers was, it seemed, on his way to town.

"Letters, my dear madam, of an urgent nature, as you will understand, bring my pleasant visit to an end. I have been absent long, and I hear that the Prince is impatient. He does not grow philosophical with years."

"La, Sir Piers, His Royal Highness is not so old," said Mrs. Garraway.

"I should be the last to think so, Mrs. Garraway," he answered. "But he has been younger and more tolerant. I will confess that whereas my blood ran warmer once, I grow larger-hearted daily. I can forgive and I can endure."

Mrs. Garraway observed archly that Sir Piers had endured a great deal of their rustic company, which fetched from him a compliment as neat as ever he paid to any Court lady.

"We shall see you soon again, sir?" asked Mrs. Garraway anxiously.

"I trust so," returned he, "but in London this time, where I shall hope to do by you some small part of what you have done by me in the Forest. We will not make you strangers."

"Oh, la, Barbara is not strange to London," simpered she.

"No," says Sir Piers, with an odd look. "You remind me. I consider Miss Barbara to be a full Londoner," and was surprised by the apparition of the girl herself. She entered, very fresh, from the garden, and flung off her hat.

"It is hot, mamma," she said. "Good day, Sir Piers. Is that your chaise before the door?"

"Sir Piers goes to town, my dear, this day," said her mother. "He is here to say good-by."

"Good-by," said Barbara, and held out her hand.

"My dear—" began Mrs. Garraway; but Sir Piers took it, stooped, and put his lips to it.

"I wish you good-by, Miss Garraway," he said, and at once took his leave in a most courteous and easy way. It was, as Mrs. Garraway said, almost as if they had said farewell to a relative; so kind he seemed.

"But we are to see him soon in town, Barbara," she pursued. "He said so. No doubt he will get us both invited to Lady Marston's. I will come this time, I promise you. I can see he means something."

Barbara was not thinking what he meant at all, and had at that time hardly any thoughts for him. But Sir Piers himself on his journey toward Winchester did turn over the girl in his mind.

"She has no discipline," he said to himself. "It is the last thing that women will learn. A woman is as selfish as a man, but, lacking of discipline, which is to say, form or order, she makes an appearance of generosity, and has an air of sacrifice. Both are false," which gave him food for thought all the way to town, and was the genesis of several celebrated *mots* at which His Royal Highness and the familiars of that circle professed themselves profoundly tickled.

Barbara's thoughts during those weeks scarcely left Gilbert, whom she now conceived herself to have done to death. She ran to extremes as easily as she ran to emotions, and the lieutenant of foot was marked and designated in her eye as her especial victim. She followed his course to Winchester in her mental vision, and sojourned with him in his lonely cell. In the light of her new mood she discovered not only how deeply she had wronged him, but also how much he had sacrificed for her; and that, she resolved, must be the measure of her

fondness for him. Her mother was indignant with Gilbert for bringing such disgrace upon them, and his own mother held her peace and avoided interrogation. It was easy to be seen that she, too, doubted, and that her son's arrest had struck at her pride as well as at her affection.

"It was for me he deserted—it was for me," cried Barbara, finding herself unable to reach the mother's heart. But that appeal was equally futile. Mrs. Faversham examined her coldly.

"I know nothing of that," she said. "But if so, it proves only that my son is a weakling. He has dishonored his father's name."

Barbara returned to Moyden with a bitter, desperate heart, and conceived a plan. She would go to Winchester and offer her evidence before the court-martial, tell the story of her wrong and of Gilbert's chivalry. Surely after that naked narrative of fact the spirits of those stern judges would be tempered, and they would deal real justice. But Barbara, emotional as she was, was not a mere foolish girl, as Blakiston had found. On second thoughts, she did not see the proper dramatic effects issuing from her scheme. The judges were cold-eyed, and grinned; they admired her for a marvelous fine girl; but they did their duty, as the corporal had done. They pushed her aside and obeyed the law, the law which created them and would destroy Gilbert. It was a machine without heart or pity, a machine in which the corporal and the judges must play their allotted parts, undeterred by the prayers or sobs of a weeping woman. Yet this design so prevailed upon Barbara

that, even with the doubt of its efficacy in her heart, she determined to go to Winchester to the trial. Alas for the failure of human purposes! Upon the day of the court-martial she was ill of a fever, tossing in her bed and talking delirious nonsense to the air. When the chill to which she had readily fallen a prey had passed away, the court-martial was over, and ex-Lieutenant Gilbert Faversham lay under sentence of death.

Major Harry Miles arrived early in the afternoon, and took tea with his hostess. He was red with color, burned with exposure, and bluffer than ever. He had no arts of conversation, but drank a dish of tea, and then took advantage of a suggestion that he should try a glass of wine.

"Perhaps 'twill be more to your taste, Major Miles," said the lady.

"Indeed, ma'am, it is," assented he, and settled down more at his ease.

Barbara sat at her embroidery on the sofa, looking very pale and thin, and paid the guest no attention. If she remembered that she had always had rather a liking for him, she remembered, too, that he was Sir Piers Blakiston's friend. She kept her eyes on her work.

"Yes, madam, we are most of us back again," said the Honorable Harry Miles, obedient to his hostess's questions, "those, that is, that haven't left their bones in Walcheren. We took Flushing, but the force was too great at Antwerp, and the General dared not venture. And here we are back in disgrace, and sick, and dead, and wounded, all told, are a pretty tale."

"And have you seen your friend, Sir Piers Blakiston, His Royal Highness's friend?" asked Mrs. Garraway, bridling at the name according to her custom. "He has been in this neighborhood lately for quite a long time. We are to visit town shortly, when we hope to see Sir Piers again."

"We are not, mamma. We shall not see him," burst out Barbara, pale-faced, from her sofa.

Major Miles coughed, and glanced at her.

"Why, yes," he said deliberately, but in such a way that his sheer force trampled on the older woman's astonished exclamations. "I saw Blakiston in town. He is muchly occupied with the winter season at Brighton, they say, which is to be very magnificent." Major Miles stopped, and having no diplomacy, deserted the subject, and heavily lurched back to the earlier topic. "Talking of Flushing, ma'am, there was one of your Hampshire folk did very well there."

"Why, that's good news for us all," said Mrs. Garraway, smiling. "And I hope Forest folk?"

"Yes, he was," said Miles. "Faversham's his name."

"Faversham!" said Mrs. Garraway, her nostrils moving.

Barbara laid aside her work.

"Was it Mr. Gilbert Faversham?" she asked in a low voice.

"That's he," said Miles cheerfully. "He got into a mess for leaving his regiment without orders. If it were not for that, why, there's no doubt he would have had his company, and been thanked besides. 'Twas he saved a mine at his own risk at Flushing. He was

marked out, I know—being of his own regiment, ma'am."

He spoke to Mrs. Garraway, but looked at Barbara. Their glances encountered, the girl's eager, the man's awkward and anxious. Barbara was aware of something that appeared to her in his gaze; he was like a dumb dog that would speak and can only show eloquent eyes. Major Miles rose to go, and Mrs. Garraway protested that he must stay and sup. Silent for a moment, he looked again at Barbara, and awkwardly fumbled out a negative. He must go, but would like to go by the Chase, if Mrs. Garraway would allow him. He had never been through the Chase. Mrs. Garraway was delighted, and Barbara got to her feet.

"I will show you, Major Miles," she said quickly.

Mrs. Garraway beamed on the visitor.

"Yes, child, you shall. Major Miles would not find his way easily. And I hope my Lord Beverley is well, Major."

It was not until they were in the Chase that Miles spoke, and it was in his habit of clumsiness and frankness.

"I have come to tell you that there is influence being brought in behalf of Mr. Faversham, Miss Garraway," he said. "He has friends."

"You, Major Miles," she said eagerly. "It is you, who know him so well, and what a brave man he is, who are helping him."

"It is others beside myself," he said.

"Yes, I know—his companions and comrades, who, like you, judge him at his true worth. Do you know,

Major, that I had intended to tell his judges all, and go before them and face them and tell them exactly why Gilbert Faversham left his regiment. But I fell ill, and was wandering in my wits. But I will tell you, and you can use it and help him. No one knows it but myself and—and another. For Mr. Faversham was too generous, too foolish to urge it in his defense. You shall know everything."

"I—I think I know a good deal," stammered the honest Major.

"How is that?" she demanded, in surprise. "You don't know."

"Mr. Faversham told me something that night he got a letter and deserted," said the Major, blundering on, "and Blakiston has told me the rest."

"Blakiston! Sir Piers!" she cried, "that villain!"

"It is he that is using his influence," pursued the Major, bent on getting to his goal.

"Sir Piers Blakiston! He is our enemy, mine and Mr. Faversham's. If we depend on him we are lost. If you know the story——"

"Oh, Blakiston is not bad," declared the Honorable Harry Miles. "'Tis a matter of women with him, you know. He has laws of his own, and thinks he has a right to make 'em. Not that that's my view. But a man's a man, Miss Garraway, even if you don't like it. You can't get over that. And, damme, Blakiston's not a bad fellow."

"You must allow me to differ, sir," says Barbara, very proud and haughty, and added again, "If he is interposing, Mr. Faversham is lost."

"Why, no, he is saved," said Miles bluntly, and to her exclamation answered, "Sir Piers has represented to His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, that a man of such services as Lieutenant Faversham rendered at Flushing deserves special consideration, and that his merits should weigh against his defaults. I believe His Royal Highness indorsed that view very strongly, with the result that His Majesty has ordered a free pardon——"

"A free pardon!" cried Barbara in an ecstasy, and in her enthusiasm clasped the soldier's hand.

When he mounted his horse at the edge of the Chase, it was with certain flattering reflections on Sir Piers's taste that Major Miles occupied his mind, and he rode pensively to Lyndhurst.

Barbara's news was not long contained in her bosom; it was broken to Mrs. Garraway, and thence sailed upon the autumn winds abroad. Mrs. Garraway received it with indifference, but afterward with a more satisfactory attitude.

"After all, I'm very glad, Barbara. There is something good in Gilbert Faversham despite his crimes, or Sir Piers would not have taken all that trouble to exert his influence."

Upon which Barbara for a moment looked as if she would have spoken and disclosed the truth, but she shut down her lips and refrained.

Major Miles had told her that Gilbert was to be released that day, and she pictured him returning to the arms of his mother amid the satisfaction of all his tenants and servants. It was not, however, to a joyful

household or among celebrations of joy that he returned that evening. The dusk had dropped when he knocked on the door, and the old butler opened to him. News had reached Mrs. Faversham of her son's release, and she had given her orders, so that the old man displayed no surprise.

"This way, Master Gilbert," he said, as if his master was a guest, an expected guest; and he led the way into the library, in which, before the dying embers of a fire, the gaunt woman sat in a tall chair. She rose to her height, and turned a cold cheek to her son.

"You have come, Gilbert," she said, without emotion. "Your supper is quite ready."

"Mother!" he said, in distress.

No sign was in her face, which was in as severe control as if it had been Sir Piers's own.

"Mother!" he appealed again.

"Gilbert, I dare say you are hungry," she said. "If you will come into the other room——"

But he muttered an exclamation of anger.

"It was so you sent me forth—it is so you welcome me back," he said. "The honor of the name, or what you think so, is more than your son, and your pride than your affection. If this is all, mother, I will go elsewhere; I will go abroad—I will not return. If my mother cannot believe in me nor respect me, I have no right to look for trust or respect in any other living soul."

Her lips trembled, but she did not spare herself nor him.

"I have welcomed you back, Gilbert, as my son,

and the heir and inheritor of an unstained name. But I cannot pretend that that name is no longer unstained, or that this has not pierced my heart."

He looked about him round the room, and its desolate and melancholy aspect struck him. The bookshelves were nude and austere, the curtains were blank and repelling, the very floor, with its cold oak, refused and denied hospitality. And the fire was in ashes that cold October day. It flashed across him in his despair that his mother was right, and that he had been wrong to return. He sighed.

"I will go to-morrow," he said, in a low voice. "You shall not be troubled by that. You are right, mother."

It was not so dark but the figures were visible out of the long window over which the blinds had not been drawn, and the sound of a horse on the drive mechanically called on Gilbert's attention. He looked out, and someone went by on horseback. Even while he was getting back his wits sufficiently to wonder who this might be, Barbara broke into the room in her riding-dress, her eyes full of excitement.

"Mrs. Faversham," she began, speaking very fast, "I have come with good news. I rode over as soon as I heard it. Gilbert is pardoned—he has received the King's free pardon——"

She paused, for the form by the window which she had not noticed moved forward.

"Gilbert!" she said.

"Barbara!"

There was a pause, and then he said:

"I thank you for your kindness in riding over to bring my mother the news. She had it, however, earlier, even before I arrived. She was quite prepared for that."

If there was any bitterness in his words it did not show in his face.

Barbara looked at the mother. The situation struck her as strange. It was not what she had expected and pictured. The grim face was turned to the vanishing fire, and Gilbert stood apart toward the window.

"Mrs. Faversham, you are glad—" she stammered.

"I am glad my son is come home," said the widow, "but I fear that he will not stay long. He is leaving early on a prolonged visit to——"

"Where?" asked Barbara breathlessly.

Gilbert turned away. His mother was silent.

"You must not go, Gilbert," cried the girl, lifting her arms toward him in appeal. "You shall not go. You have suffered enough. There is no one who is not in your favor, from His Majesty downward. They understand all. It is known how brave you were at Flushing. The Prince of Wales has spoken of it, Major Miles tells me. Mrs. Faversham, he must not go. He is a brave man—none will ever know how brave. You should be proud of him, as—as I am."

Gilbert turned to her again with a wondering look, and his mother's head was lifted in attention.

"If you go, I will go," cried Barbara, in a tremulous voice. "I will not let you go alone."

Gilbert stooped forward and took her in his arms, where she gave a little sob.

"Barbara!" he said, in a voice of wonder and ecstasy.

Mrs. Faversham looked at them for a moment steadily, and rising, she stooped from her gaunt height, and raking the embers of the fire together, put on more coal.

Sir Piers Blakiston was subjected to the fire of many questions on his return to town, but had his retorts very prompt and ready.

"I have been at my pigsty in the Isle of Wight, sir," he said to the Prince. "It needed cleaning." And Sir Piers's pigsty became a phrase in the vogue.

The news of Faversham's liberation was brought to him in Brighton by Harry Miles, who also made certain statements as to Miss Garraway. But Major Miles was always a reticent man.

"You interest me, Harry," said Sir Piers, over his cards, "you interest me unusually. She was a pretty, handsome flower, and is," he added meditatively, choosing a card. "She thinks that ass must be rewarded for his pains, dear soul. She is too conscientious, damme, and a conscientious woman is the devil!" He played a card, and resumed: "The light, Harry, is in my eyes. I see you have lived out of civilization long, and have lost your manners. Please remove it. I would have my wife beautiful and my mistress conscientious. After all, my first thought was the more prudent, Harry. I think it is as well she is not to be—my wife."

THE END (1)

The Reckoning.

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

The author's intention is to treat, in a series of four or five romances, that part of the war for independence which particularly affected the great landed families of northern New York, the Johnsons, represented by Sir William, Sir John, Guy Johnson, and Colonel Claus; the notorious Butlers, father and son, the Schuylers, Van Rensselaers, and others.

The first romance of the series, Cardigan, was followed by the second, The Maid-at-Arms. The third, in order, is not completed. The fourth is the present volume.

As Cardigan pretended to portray life on the baronial estate of Sir William Johnson, the first uneasiness concerning the coming trouble, the first discordant note struck in the harmonious councils of the Long House, so, in The Maid-at-Arms, which followed in order, the author attempted to paint a patroon family disturbed by the approaching rumble of battle. That romance dealt with the first serious split in the Iroquois Confederacy; it showed the Long House shattered though not fallen; the demoralization and final flight of the great landed families who remained loyal to the British Crown; and it struck the key-note to the future attitude of the Iroquois toward the patriots of the frontier—revenge for their losses at the battle of Oriskany—and ended with the march of the militia and continental troops on Saratoga.

The third romance, as yet incomplete and unpublished, deals with the war-path and those who followed it led by the landed gentry of Tryon County; and ends with the first solid blow delivered at the Long House, and the terrible punishment of the Great Confederacy.

The present romance, the fourth in chronological order, picks up the thread at that point.

The author is not conscious of having taken any liberties with history in preparing a framework of facts for a mantle of romance.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

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